

Boots and Her Buddies

OR

When Man Plays Maiden

A Farcial Comedy in Three Acts

BY

FRANCES HUNTLEY



PRICE 50 CENTS

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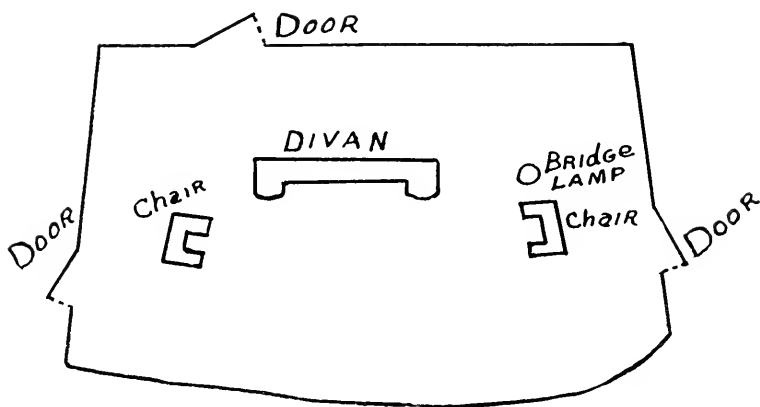
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TMP96-006551

SEP 12 1933
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Suggested Stage Setting



NOTES ON SETTING

The stage is a simple living-room setting with ordinary furniture. The above suggestions are supplemented by pictures on the walls, end-tables, or any other furniture that may be easily secured to fit into the scene to lend attractiveness. A large rug will add to the effect. The same setting is used throughout. But if desired some extra touches may be added for the second and third acts to give it the appearance of having been "fixed up" for the party. This is optional, however.

COSTUMING

All the costuming is modern. The girls in the first act have on evening, or semi-evening dresses if practical. If not the sport-suits will do. The boys should have on dark suits. In the second and third acts all the girls wear sport clothes. The boys may change to light suits if desirable to change at all.

In making up Jed for the widow's part, use fairly attractive clothes, and if it is not practical to have a wig the part is arranged so that he may wear a hat throughout. Each time he comes in as the widow he is threatening to leave. By using the hat it is easier to give the appearance of a woman.

Further and more complete directions for costuming and make-up will be furnished in director's sheets sent with the order.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

BOOTS BOYD—A vivacious, pretty girl of 18.

PROFESSOR NED BOYD—Her father, about 45.

ALBERT STEVENS—A bachelor friend of the family who marries and shows off.

MRS. STEVENS—His wife who likes to be shown off.

JED HARDING—A boy friend of Boots' who will not be domineered by her, and who plays the part of a young widow.

BILL THOMPSON—A veritable clown. Jed's friend.

PERCIVAL MANNERS—A young Englishman, Bill and Jed's friend, who manages to captivate the girls.

JANE NELSON—Boots' friend—about 19.

MARY ROLAND—Another of Boots' friends—same age.

MRS. AUDREY HEMINGWAY—Whom Professor Boyd would like to marry much to Boots' dislike.

MANDY—The old servant.

HOWARD NUTZ—A boy friend of Boots'.

To suit the needs of varied size classes the author has written parts for any combination of characters up to four additional boys or four or six additional girls. If your cast for instance is six boys and ten girls the parts for the additional four girls will be sent upon receipt of the order for the play if you will give us the number of additional characters needed. Or if you need seven boys and nine girls or any similar combination we can furnish clever parts for these numbers.

NOTE: *These parts are not mailed for examination due to fact that they are printed in pamphlet form separate from the books, and packing and postage would not be feasible.*

ACT I. The living-room of Professor Boyd's home.

ACT II. The same. Two days later.

ACT III. The same. Next day.

Boots and Her Buddies

ACT I

TIME: *Present. Nine o'clock in the evening.*

PLACE: *The living-room of Professor Boyd's home.*

SCENE: *The living-room is a pleasant place with furniture not too extravagant. Near the rear center is a divan, flanked on each side by two comfortable chairs. On the right is an easy chair with a bridge lamp beside it for reading purposes. At the rear corner and on the left are doors leading out to the other rooms, and at the right is a door leading to the front hallway.*

[When the curtain rises Professor Boyd is seen seated in the chair by the reading lamp perusing a formidable looking volume. Occasionally he nods his head and omits a guttural sound of approval. He is a nice looking man in the middle forties with hair beginning to gray about his temples. Almost immediately Boots enters. She is an attractive, vivacious girl, slightly spoiled perhaps but likable. She is dressed for a dance. As she enters rather nervously the Professor raises his eyes from the book.]

PROF. Why so nervous, daughter?

BOOTS. I just despise to be kept waiting. Those boys are already an hour late.

PROF. Come over and talk to me awhile. *[She goes over and sits on the arm of his chair.]* It isn't often we get to talk together of late.

BOOTS. No, you're too busy writing your old books on how to rear a family to have time to look after your own.

PROF. *[Smiling]*. It does seem that way.

BOOTS. And when you're not writing you're off somewhere lecturing.

PROF. And when *I'm* home at night *you* are off to some dance or other.

BOOTS. Not every night, now.

PROF. I hope the boys don't come. I would like for the two of us to just sit here and talk all alone.

BOOTS *[Restlessly]*. But, Daddy, this is the big dance.

PROF. Who is taking you?

BOOTS. Jed Harding—if he ever gets here.

PROF. That's Byron Harding's boy, isn't it?

BOOTS. I think so.

PROF. They're splendid people. Is he a nice young man?

BOOTS [*Interested*]. Yes, very nice in some ways—perhaps a little old-fashioned, and certainly bossy.

PROF. How is that?

BOOTS. He won't let a girl he goes with smoke—

PROF [*Interrupting*]. That's in his favor.

BOOTS. And he just tries to be so hard-boiled. The other night when he took me to the dance, just because I went off with Howard and he missed his dance, when I came back he informed me that if I wanted to be with Howard I might get him to take me home. And when I said that I had as soon have it that way as not, he turned on his heel and walked away just like that. [*She snaps her finger.*] And left me alone in the middle of the floor so embarrassed I could have sunk right through it.

PROF. Well, if he took you to the dance it was your duty to be nice to him.

BOOTS. Believe me no other boy would have the nerve to treat me like that—not even if I had talked to Howard.

PROF. Then why are you going with him again tonight?

BOOTS. I don't know. I just like him, I reckon. [*Suddenly getting up.*] But if he doesn't soon get here I'm going to call up some one else.

PROF. I wouldn't do that.

BOOTS. I'll give him about ten minutes longer. [*She is about to go.*]

PROF [*Suddenly changing the subject. Pensively*]. I guess my little girl will soon be getting married and leaving me all alone.

BOOTS [*Turning*]. Why Daddy, you know I wouldn't do any such thing.

PROF. Most girls do after they begin to get your age.

BOOTS [*Going back and tousling his hair*]. Come on—out with it. What's on your mind?

PROF. How would you like for me to get married again, Boots?

BOOTS [*Slightly astounded*]. Daddy! Why I believe you're sick.

PROF. No, seriously.

BOOTS. I just think it would spoil everything.

PROF [*A little disappointed*]. Spoil things? How?

BOOTS. Why, by bringing another woman here. Maybe we wouldn't get along at all and it would be just one big fuss. And then you and I would never have any time together again—by ourselves I mean. [*Suddenly.*] Oh, I believe if you were to I would run off and get married myself—to Howard, or Jed, or anybody rather than staying here with another woman.

[*The doorbell rings, and Boots suddenly jumps up.*]

BOOTS. There they are, I guess. [*She hurries out and Mandy enters from the door on the right. She is a congenial Negro mammy, slow moving and slow-talking.*]

MANDY. A visitor to see you, Marse Ned.

PROF. A man or a lady.

MANDY. It's a gen'man, suh.

PROF. Show him in, and tell Boots it is not her visitors.

MANDY. Yas-suh. [*She goes out and a moment later Albert Stevens enters. He is a congenial, slightly stout bachelor about the age of the Professor. His hair, too, is grey about the temples.*]

STEVENS [*Heartily*]. Hello, hello! You old hermit.

PROF [*With a relieved expression*]. Hello, Albert. I certainly didn't expect you to be dropping in.

STEVENS. You can't ever tell where I shall be. A bachelor's privilege, you know.

PROF. I wish I knew how you manage it. It doesn't work that way with a widower.

STEVENS. That's the penalty for being a noted author, my dear Ned. If you want privacy you must be a nobody like me.

PROF. I would like to trade places with you for awhile—books and all.

STEVENS [*Throwing up his hands in mock horror*]. Never! Anybody could tell after one look at me that I couldn't write a book.

PROF. Well, I am glad you came. Have a seat.

STEVENS. Boy, boy, you sat the reading public on its ear

again with that new book of yours on family life. You seem to know the right chord to strike every time.

PROF [*Pleased*]. Yes, I am greatly pleased with the reception given it by the public.

STEVENS. A great book, Ned. A great book.

PROF. Then you've read it.

STEVENS [*Laughing good-naturedly*]. There now, you shouldn't have asked me that.

PROF [*Pretending to be hurt*]. Don't tell me you haven't.

STEVENS. I'll have to admit I haven't. I never could read a book on sociology without going to sleep, and I didn't even have the nerve to tackle yours.

PROF [*Laughing too*]. Same old Albert. But after all you are probably better off.

STEVENS. You see, I wanted to retain my respect for your ability.

PROF. Is that another dig?

STEVENS. Not exactly. But I knew you didn't know anything about rearing a family.

PROF [*Smiling*]. You should read what the critics say.

STEVENS. But I have seen the way your only child runs you ragged around here.

PROF [*Chuckling*]. You don't have to know much to write a book.

STEVENS. So I have observed.

PROF. Besides I didn't tell them to do as I have done, but to do as I told them to do.

STEVENS. That's fair enough, I guess.

PROF. Then too, not many of them will have a daughter like Boots.

STEVENS. How is Boots?

PROF. Well and hearty if that is what you mean. But I'll admit I don't know what to do with her.

STEVENS. What's wrong?

PROF [*With a gesture of inadequacy*]. I don't know. She is forever on the go, and there are dozens of young men hanging around all of the time to take her places.

STEVENS. Which means that she is pretty and intelligent. You should be proud of her.

PROF. It is well enough for you bachelors to say such things, but it is different when you have a daughter and realize that you alone are responsible for her.

STEVENS. Oh, the kid is all right. Let her have a good time.

PROF. I want her to enjoy life, but I don't like for her to be running around with every Tom-Dick-and-Harry day and night. And I just can't be here all of the time to look after her myself since my duties take me away so much of the time. If I knew a responsible middle-aged lady whom I could employ, I would get her to come here and take complete charge of Boots.

STEVENS. You mean a kind of governess.

PROF. Exactly. Someone who would make Boots mind even if she had to spank her to do it.

[*Boots enters.*]

BOOTS. Hello, Mr. Stevens.

STEVENS. How are you tonight, Boots?

BOOTS. Fine and dandy, only I'm mad as a hornet.

STEVENS. That's bad.

BOOTS. I'll bet Eve had a reason for double-crossing Adam when she got him to bite that apple.

STEVENS. How is that?

BOOTS. All men are alike. They are forever trying to pull a fast one on us girls.

STEVENS [*Smiling*]. Keep them in check, Boots.

BOOTS. Never mind, I shall. [*Turning towards the telephone.*] Daddy I'm going to call Howard and get him to come up for me.

PROF. I'd wait a little longer if I were you. Jed will probably be here in a few minutes.

BOOTS. So will Howard. [*She picks up the receiver while the two men watch.*] Central—give me 8443.

PROF. I think you are acting rude.

BOOTS [*Into the phone*]. Hello. Who is this? —Oh, it is you Howard? How did you happen to be answering the phone? —I see. Has the dance started? —You don't have a date do you? —Then how about coming up for me? —How about bringing two boys along. Jane and Mary are with me. —Yes. That's good. —Sure. I'm ready now. —How long

will it be? —Ten minutes! That's fine . . . Be waiting for you. [*She hangs up.*] I guess this will teach Jed a lesson.

PROF [*Protesting*]. I would rather for you to not be so hasty. I don't like for you to be going with Howard Nutz so much. He doesn't appear to be any too nice.

BOOTS. Oh, Howard is all right—probably a little stuck on himself, but you can depend on him.

PROF. But . . .

BOOTS [*Interrupting*]. Now, don't lecture to me when I'm going out to a dance, Daddy—and that right here before Mr. Stevens. [*She laughs.*] Mr. Stevens I wish you would talk to Daddy for me. He has written so many books on how to rear a family that he is actually beginning to believe some of the rot he writes.

PROF. Boots!

BOOTS. Oh, pardon! I didn't mean it, Daddy. [*She impulsively kisses him on the cheek.*] What you write is perfectly good for *other* people, but *you* shouldn't try it on your only daughter. Do you think so, Mr. Stevens?

STEVENS [*Goodnaturedly*]. I'll talk to him Boots.

BOOTS [*Gaily*]. Do that for me. [*She starts out.*] Daddy, if Jed comes by tell him that I've already gone. [*She goes through the rear door.*]

PROF [*Turning to Stevens with a futile gesture*]. See how she is. As headstrong as a mule.

STEVENS. I think it serves the young gentleman right. He ought to be taken down a notch for keeping a pretty girl waiting. Let her stand up for her rights and she probably won't marry the first puppy that makes love to her. Where, on the other hand, if he forced her to be nice to every boy who tried to run over her she wouldn't have a mind of her own and would probably marry the first one who made her think he was Tarzan of the Apes.

PROF. You argue so well you ought to write a book on the proper methods of bringing up a daughter. Your bachelor philosophy should add a note that would be refreshing.

STEVENS. Not me. I'll leave the book writing to you professors. But I do know one thing.

PROF. What is it?

STEVENS. You ought to get married.

PROF. What?

STEVENS. You need a wife as much as Boots needs a mother.

PROF. There you go with some more of your bachelor advice. While you are lecturing me why don't you practice what you are preaching?

STEVENS. I am doing exactly that.

PROF [*Astounded*]. You—marrying?

STEVENS. Yours truly, and none other.

PROF. I can hardly believe it. Who is she?

STEVENS. Alice Fenters. You probably remember her.

PROF. Sure I remember her. Congratulations.

STEVENS. Thanks, Ned. I guess now you will concede my right to offer advice.

PROF. After hearing *you* are going to get married I concede anything.

STEVENS. Then quit worrying about Boots. She knows how to take care of herself.

PROF. Of course, I don't doubt that. She is a good girl, but she is so young and flighty. Mandy just idolizes her, and does everything she asks. And now there are all of these boys trying to see which one can do her the most favors. I am afraid she will be running off and marrying one of them.

STEVENS. I've always heard there is safety in numbers.

PROF. That is one consolation. But I don't see how she keeps her head with all that attention.

STEVENS. Which goes to prove that young people keep their heads much better than we older ones would in their place.

PROF. I give up. You beat me arguing.

STEVENS. Then take my advice and marry Audrey Hemingway.

PROF [*Smiling*]. I'm afraid it wouldn't work. I have a grown daughter to think of as well as myself.

STEVENS. All the more reason you should. She would make Boots a good mother as well as you a good wife.

PROF [*Shaking his head*]. Boots doesn't like her at all. I asked her to come over and help Boots with her party next week, and I am kept on the verge of nervous prostration for

fear Boots will order her out of the house each time she comes over.

STEVENS. That's just jealousy. Every child feels that way at the thought of their parents getting married the second time. You can't afford to pay any attention to them.

PROF. Maybe not, but I am afraid to try it, Albert. Boots and I have gotten along rather nicely so far and rather than run the risk of making her unhappy I think I shall try to get a governess and manage along somehow until she is married.

STEVENS. I think you are foolish, but have it your own way. [*He rises to go.*]

PROF. You aren't going so soon?

STEVENS. Yes, I have to be running.

PROF. Call again soon.

STEVENS. Righto. I'll bring the wife over some day and show her off and make you jealous.

PROF. Fine.

[*Stevens leaves. Prof turns and picks up his book just as Mandy enters and starts across the room.*]

PROF. Mandy?

MANDY [*Turning*]. Yas-suh, Marse Ned.

PROF. I think I shall go up to my study to write some. If anybody calls tell them I'm not at home, please.

MANDY. I sho will Marse Ned.

[*He goes out. And Mandy is about to take a dip of snuff when the doorbell rings. She crosses over to the front door.*]

MANDY [*Heard just off-stage*]. No mam, Mr. Boyd ain't at home.

MRS. HEMINGWAY [*Off-stage*]. But I happen to know that he is. [*They appear in the doorway, Mrs. Hemingway leading. She is a good-looking woman of middle-age with a rather emphatic way of moving and speaking.*]

MRS. H. The idea of telling me he wasn't at home.

MANDY. But Marse Ned done tole me to say that he was not at home.

MRS. H. [*Emphatically*]. If he did say that, it wasn't meant for me.

MANDY. But he said tell anybody.

MRS. H. Well, when he says anybody it doesn't apply to

me, understand. Tell Mr. Boyd I wish to see him. [*She picks up a magazine.*]

MANDY [*Reluctantly*]. Yes, mam. [*She leaves out mumbling, just as Boots enters.*]

MRS. H. [*Pleasantly*]. How are you Beulah?

BOOTS. Oh, hello. I thought you were someone else. Won't you have a seat. Father will be down directly, I'm sure.

MRS. H. Thanks. [*Takes her seat*]. I came over to discuss plans for your party.

BOOTS. I am sorry that I must be away. But Father will tell you what I have planned.

MRS. H. I'm sure you will like the plans I have made.

BOOTS. On the contrary, I am sure you will like *mine* when Father tells them to you. [*She turns to go and Mrs. H. gives her a killing look but changes her expression quickly as Prof. enters.*]

PROF [*Pleasantly*]. This is indeed a pleasure.

MRS. H. I just dropped in a moment to see about the party.

PROF. Did you mention your plans to Boots?

MRS. H. I did but she said something about some other plans.

PROF [*Worried*]. I wish you would talk to her. She wants to have a house party, and that means a crowd swarming in and out for three whole days. I don't believe I can stand it.

MRS. H. Then why don't you put your foot right down and say no to her.

PROF. Well, it is *her* party, and I didn't want to spoil it for her by flatly refusing.

MRS. H. [*Suddenly*]. What you should do is get married.

PROF [*A little flustered*]. Yes, so I've been told once before tonight.

MRS. H. Really you do need a wife. And Boots is at the age when she needs a mature woman's counsel.

PROF. I've been thinking of getting a governess.

MRS. H. Of course that would be better than nothing, but no woman you get is going to command the respect from Boots that your wife would.

PROF [*Taking a deep breath*]. I'm beginning to realize why mothers get grey.

MRS. H. [*Rising*]. Well, I guess since there is nothing I can do I shall go.

PROF. [*Rising*]. You will come back tomorrow and try to make Boots change her plans?

MRS. H. [*Flattered*]. For your sake I shall. And, in the meantime, you get out and look up a good wife like I told you to. [*Archly.*] You know you still have quite a bit of sex appeal. [*She leaves. Prof is a little embarrassed and pleased at the last statement. He straightens his tie self-consciously and walks over to a mirror against the wall and surveys himself admiringly as he mutters to himself.*]

PROF. Sex appeal! Humph, I hadn't thought of that.

[*Boots enters, and Prof turns embarrassed at being caught.*]

BOOTS. So she has gone?

PROF. Yes—she just left.

BOOTS [*Picking up a magazine and flipping the leaves impatiently*]. Haven't any of the boys shown up yet?

PROF. Not yet.

BOOTS [*Impatiently*]. It's beginning to look as if I'm going to have to call someone else up yet before I can get to the dance. I have never been so embarrassed in my life for all this to happen after I asked Jane and Mary to go with me. [*The doorbell rings. Boots places the magazine upon Prof's book on the table quickly.*] You answer the door, and if it's Jed, tell him I've gone. If it's Howard tell him that I'll be down in a minute. [*She runs out and Prof answers the door. He ushers in Howard Nutz.*]

PROF. Come in. Boots will be down directly.

HOWARD [*Importantly*]. A splendid evening, sir.

PROF. Is that so? I hadn't noticed it.

HOWARD. It's beautiful outside.

PROF. Just have a seat. And you will excuse me please. [*He turns to go.*]

HOWARD. Certainly. [*He is turning to go just as Mary and Jane enter.*]

JANE AND MARY. Hello! Hello, Howard, etc.

HOWARD. Hello!

JANE. You are certainly a hero tonight.

HOWARD [*Not too good-humoredly*]. Even if a late arrival.

MARY. Now don't let that worry you. Better late than never, you know.

JANE. He who laughs last laughs best.

HOWARD. What's keeping Boots?

JANE. Oh, she's coming.

[Boots enters.]

MARY. Here she is now.

BOOTS. So you got here at last?

HOWARD. Righto. Are we all ready for a hot party?

MARY. And how.

BOOTS. Where are the boys you were to bring for Jane and Mary?

HOWARD. They are outside keeping the car warm.

BOOTS. Then let's go. We are late now.

[NOTE: Above lines are changed and one or two boys are introduced along with Howard if needed. These parts are furnished upon request to schools ordering the play.]

[Mary and Jane go towards the door. Howard hangs slightly back.]

HOWARD. Say, Boots, why the sudden ring at the last minute? Didn't get rooked, did you?

BOOTS [Tartly]. Now see here, Professor, do I have to answer a quiz just because I asked you to take me?

HOWARD. I do think you might explain.

BOOTS. If you don't want to take me say so.

HOWARD [Quickly]. I didn't say I didn't want to take you.

BOOTS. Then come on, and cut the questioning.

HOWARD. All right. But it does look like you might treat a fellow fair sometimes.

BOOTS. Fair? You asked me all last week for this date, and now when I give it to you, you talk about me not being fair. Come on. [She grabs him by the arm and is propelling him through the door when she catches a glimpse of the professor entering the opposite door.]

BOOTS [Giving Howard a push]. Run along I'll catch up. [She goes back to Prof.] Now, Daddy, forget what I said awhile ago, and run along to bed and get a good night's sleep.

PROF. Sure! You run along and have a good time.

BOOTS [*Waving him a farewell as she disappears*]. Okay. Goodnight.

[*Prof. sits a moment gazing after her, then looks aimlessly about for his book but failing to find it goes to the door and calls.*]

PROF. Mandy! Oh, Mandy!

MANDY [*Off stage*]. Yassuh.

PROF. Where did you put my book?

MANDY. I'se coming. [*After a slight pause she comes waddling in.*] What is it? You can't find youah book?

PROF. No. I am certain I left it here on the chair.

MANDY [*Turns over the magazine Boots left and finds it. She grins*]. Lawsy, Marse Ned, you sho couldn't find your nose if it wuz to happen to git offen your face.

PROF [*Takes the book*]. I thought I had looked every place for it.

MANDY. Ain't no telling what would happen to you if you didn't have me and Miss Boots to look after you.

PROF. Well, Mandy, I'll tell you what I am planning to do about it.

MANDY. What's dat, Marse Ned?

PROF. Everybody has been telling me to get married. I am about to think it is the proper thing to do.

MANDY [*Not liking this*]. Shucks alive, Marse Ned, they ain't no sense in you gettin' married. Sho'ly you's jokin', ain't you?

PROF. No, Mandy. I am really serious.

MANDY. Den what you goin' to do with me and Miss Boots?

PROF. Why you will just stay on.

MANDY. Now, Marse Ned, you know me and dat chile don't want no other woman comin' in here bossing us around.

PROF. I'm beginning to think Boots needs a mother to look after her.

MANDY [*Up in arms*]. Now, Marse Ned, you ain't incineratin' that I ain't looked after dat chile?

PROF. No, no. Not at all. You have done a good job. [*Dismissing the subject.*] Anyway it won't happen right away, so don't get worried over it.

MANDY [*A relieved laugh*]. Lawdy, I'se sho glad you wuz

just jokin'. I was about to think you wuz really serious about de thing.

PROF [*He turns to go*]. I want you to remain up until Boots comes in.

MANDY. Yassuh. I'll be up waitin' for her. You just go ahead and read your book. I'll look after my honey chile. [*He goes. Mandy seats herself with a grunt into a chair and pulls a snuff box from her pocket and while in the process of getting a dip of snuff mumbles to herself.*]

MANDY. Humph! Dat's de way with dem mens—just about de time you thinks they're getting old enough to have some sense in their heads they get marryin' in it again. The idea of Marse Ned thinkin' I can't take care of my honey chile when I'se raised her since she ain't no bigger'n a kitten. Besides he oughten to know dey ain't no woman good enough fer him. [*She gets up, and starts out.*] Humph! Just wait till I tells Miss Boots. I bet he'll change his mind then. [*She goes out, and a moment later Bill Thompson, Percival Manners and Jed Harding knock lightly and enter. Bill is a congenial young man with a keen sense of humor and full of devilment. Percival Manners is a slightly lean-looking young man who is slow to catch a joke, and who does not quite follow all American figures of speech. Jed Harding is a good looking chap with an open, manly face. He enjoys life, but has a frank way of expressing himself that is appealing. All three are dressed in dark suits, neatly pressed. They come in with hats in hand, and seeing no one is in, make their way towards the center of the room and stand for a little as if expecting someone to come. They begin talking in a slightly subdued tone.*]

BILL [*Grinning at Jed*]. So this is where the fair damsel of the golden tresses and fair features resides?

JED [*Countering*]. You are now in the castle of the fairy Queen.

PERCIVAL. My word, you are rawther extravagant with your praise.

JED. So will you be after you have seen her.

BILL. Oh, she is a peach, all right. I met her last week and immediately tried for a date—but no luck. You seem to have

to take your turn on the waiting list.

PERCIVAL. Aw, I say, she must be terribly fetching.

BILL. Fetching! That's no word for it. Boy, she's got It, Them, That and Those!

PERCIVAL [*Not understanding*]. It, that, them and those what?

BILL. Just IT, that's all.

JED [*Laughing*]. That's American for fetching and attractive combined.

PERCIVAL [*Laughing*]. Aw, I see. Another of your bally American expressions—like sausage.

JED [*He and Bill laugh*]. No, no, not sausage. Boloney.

PERCIVAL [*Grinning*]. But, I say, boloney and sausage are the same thing.

BILL. Not in American, old chap. Remember you have left the land of John Bull.

JED [*Looking impatiently at his watch*]. Say, I thought they would have been waiting on us when we are an hour late.

BILL. Come on, look up a bell or something. I crave action, my boy—action. Here I have been in the fairy castle three whole minutes and all is quiet along the western front, and not a skirt in sight.

JED. I imagine they had about given us out, with us an hour late because you let that flivver run out of gas two miles out of town.

BILL. How was I to know it was going to pick this night of all nights to run out of gas? Be yourself.

JED. Any night would suit it to stop if the gas got out.

BILL. Not a chance. Why usually it will run further than that on its reputation.

JED. Oh, you're full of banana oil.

PERCIVAL. Banana oil?

BILL [*Not to be squelched*]. Just another American custom, Perc, old boy. Banana oil, boloney, hot air, verbose, or plain old unadulterated bull—it's all the same in American.

PERCIVAL. Oh, I say, I never will get used to your bally expressions.

BILL [*Imitating the English drawl*]. Aw, you're bally right you will, Percival, old boy. You're improving remarkably fast

already. [*Jed is again looking at his watch.*] How about going back to the front door and giving the doorbell a push, Jed. Maybe they have gone to sleep.

JED. Oh, don't talk your head off.

BILL [*Grinning good naturedly*]. Just for that crack, I hope that was her leaving in the car we saw driving away when we came up.

JED [*Rather in a bragging manner*]. No, no. I don't think she would do that. She tried something like that the other night and I taught her a lesson.

BILL. What-a-man!

PERCIVAL. A dawshing Romeo I call it.

[*Just here Mandy comes shuffling in and suddenly realizes that the boys are there.*]

MANDY. Lawsy, you young mens done nearly scared me stiff.

BILL [*Grinning*]. Now don't get pale, auntie. Don't turn pale. We aren't bandits.

JED. Mandy, will you tell Miss Boots that we are here.

MANDY [*Peering into Jed's face and recognizing him*]. Why if it ain't Mr. Jed. How is you feeling, sir?

JED. Fine, thanks. But run along and tell her. We shall be late now for the dance.

MANDY. I'se sho sorry to tell you, Mr. Jed, but that chile done just gone off with another boy.

BILL [*Clearing his throat loudly*]. Hum-m-m!

PERCIVAL. But, I say.

JED [*Simultaneously*]. How about the other girls? Did they go along too?

MANDY. Yassuh. They went too.

JED. With whom did they go?

MANDY. That no count Mr. Nutz.

JED. I see.

MANDY. She said tell you you could come on up to the dance.

BILL [*Quoting*]. And so the little fairy Queen flew away with the falling dusk and Prince Charming was left all alone. [*He grins.*]

JED. Can the comedy, please.

MANDY. What's that he's saying?

JED. Nothing. [*Suddenly.*] Say, Mandy, do you happen to have some hot coffee you could bring us a cup? We didn't get into town for supper.

MANDY [*Grinning broadly. She likes Jed*]. Dat I is, Mr. Jed. I done put me on a pot so's I could stay awake till Miss Boots got back. But you better be going on up to that dance. Dat chile is goin' to be lookin' wid big eyes for you.

JED. I'm not going to the dance.

MANDY. Not goin'? Lawdy massy, Mr. Jed. It'll break dat chile's heart if you don't go.

JED. I reckon not.

MANDY. Dat it will. She had her heart set on you being there.

JED. She won't see me tonight. Now run along like a good girl and bring us three cups of good hot coffee and a couple of those cookies like you had the other day. They were great.

MANDY. Yassuh. I'll be back in a shake. [*She leaves.*]

BILL [*Quoting Jed's words of a few minutes back*]. "Oh, no. She won't do anything like that. She tried it the other night but I taught her a lesson . . ."

JED. Will you kindly pull the zipper on that mouth of yours for a while.

BILL [*Wryly saluting*]. At your service, Prince!

PERCIVAL. My word, Jed, don't you suppose we had better run along to the dance? The girls would feel better if we did go.

JED. If you two want to go, the way is open. I'm staying.

BILL. Old what-a-man is going to pull a stubborn act now, Perc, old boy. Don't crab it by trying to persuade him.

JED. Don't you see that she did this just to cut back at me for what happened the other night. She thinks we will follow her. That's why she did it.

BILL [*Pretending to yawn and stretching out in a chair*]. Oh, well, it will feel great to take a night off for a change, and rest up. [*Waving his hand so as to take in the room.*] Here in the beautiful fairy's castle with a coal black mammy to feed us coffee and cake. And we shall let the beautiful ladies weep copiously over our absence, and strive to quell their tears another day.

PERCIVAL. My word, Bill old chap, I never knew you were so romantically inclined.

JED [*A little ill-humored*]. He's just trying to be a silly ass—that's all. [*Bill grins broadly and is about to answer but Mandy has come back through the door with the coffee and three cups and saucers on a tray.*]

BILL. Ah-ha! The rich aroma of fragrant coffee is a cheerful thing, eh, Prince? [*Jed gives him a hard look as if he is about to say something, but Bill gives a quick salute and grins so Jed is forced to laugh too.*] Righto, your honor!

MANDY. Here it am, Marse Jed, steaming hot.

JED. Thank you, Mandy. I'll remember you Christmas.

BILL. And I'll get your birthday, Mandy. When is it? [*Mandy is about to answer but he cuts her short.*] Never mind just hang up two stockings.

MANDY. Yassuh. [*She is pouring the coffee.*]

JED. By the way, Mandy, why did Miss Boots decide to leave before we got here?

MANDY [*Confiding*]. I tell you, Mr. Jed, I think she was afraid you was being late just for spite, and she called up dat Mr. Nutz just to cut at you.

JED. I thought so.

MANDY. But she sho likes you, Mr. Jed.

BILL. And boy she shows it.

MANDY. Marse Ned he done tried to get her not to, but lawdy, she just don't pay no more attention to Marse Ned. So Marse Ned he's been saying he's going to get married or get a woman to stay here and look after her.

JED. She needs one. I'd like to be the woman he gets just long enough to give her one good spanking.

BILL. Boy, how I would like to see that. I bid ahead of time to referee and if she knocks you out I swear to give you a long count.

MANDY [*Turning to go*]. I'll go heat the coffee again, and I'll be back after a while to get the things.

JED. Thanks, Mandy. [*She goes out with the coffee pot.*]

BILL [*Suddenly. He is grinning broadly*]. You know, talking of spanking that young lady gives me a glowing feeling near the solar plexus, and I got an idea, boys—a great idea.

PERCIVAL. Pour out the beans, old chap.

BILL [*Laughing loudly*]. Ha, ha. You mean spill the beans—Spill the beans.

PERCIVAL. Bah-jove, you're right—Spill the beans.

BILL. Jed, you heard Mandy say that her old man was going to employ a governess.

JED. Yes.

BILL [*Enthusiastically*]. How about you dressing up in that costume you wore to the masquerade last month over in Washington. Everybody thought you were a woman. If you could get him to hire you for just one day it would be a great joke on her.

PERCIVAL. Bah-jove, that would be a ripping.

JED [*Suddenly*]. Say, I'll do it.

BILL. Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy. I just got to get a date so I can be around while this is being pulled off.

PERCIVAL. Get me in too, old chap.

[*Just here Prof. comes through the door.*]

PROF. How do you do, gentlemen. Mandy told me you were here.

JED [*He and the other boys rise*]. Good evening, Mr. Boyd. These are my friends, Mr. Thompson and Mr. Manners.

PROF. How do you do. [*He shakes hands.*]

BILL. Howdy.

PERCIVAL. How do you do.

PROF. I'm sorry you found my daughter gone, but I am also glad to find that you made yourselves at home.

JED. Mandy took care of us.

PROF. I feel that I must apologize for the way Boots acted tonight. I understand you were to come for her.

JED. That is all right, sir. We were a little late on account of running out of gas outside of town.

PROF. I am sure the girls would be glad to have you go on down to the dance. You would not miss much of it.

JED. I'm sorry that we cannot go. I am leaving town for an extended trip tonight, and would not have been able to take in the dance anyway.

PROF. I'm sure the girls will be sorry they did not get to see you.

JED. Give my regards to them and tell them that we were sorry we were forced to inconvenience them.

PROF. I shall tell them.

JED. By the way, Mandy told us that you were thinking of employing a companion or governess for Boots.

PROF. I had thought of it if I could get a dependable lady of refinement.

JED. When I heard of it I thought of a lady whom I know of, that would just fit the bill. She is a widow, dependable, refined and positive. I am sure you could not go wrong in securing her services.

PROF. Who is she? [*The boys exchange nervous glances, but Bill quickly supplies a name.*]

BILL. Mrs. Penny. She is unusually capable if you could get her.

PROF. That sounds like the type of person I wanted.

JED. Shall I leave word for her to call around to see you within the next few days.

PROF. By all means do so. Does she live here in town?

JED. Uh—No—That is, she is visiting in town at present.

PROF. Then if you think she would be interested in the place ask her to call tomorrow.

JED. Then I shall get word to her before I leave town.

PROF. I shall appreciate that. And if you gentlemen will excuse me I think I shall call Mandy and have a cup of coffee with you. [*He goes through the door.*]

JED [*Excitedly*]. Reckon I can pull it?

BILL. Sure you can. No one would ever suspect it being you.

PERCIVAL [*Doubtfully*]. I say, I don't see how you can do it. I don't think I would try it.

BILL. Sure, he can do it. I'll bet twenty-five dollars he won't be recognized.

PERCIVAL. Bah-jove, you know I think I'll take that bet.

BILL. Fine. Hear that, Jed. He bet me twenty-five dollars. Boy, My money is on you. Now do your stuff.

JED. I'm not afraid of the old man recognizing me but I am a little afraid Boots will recognize my voice.

BILL. Not a chance. She would never suspect it being you.

JED [*Grinning*]. Well, if I get in jail you fellows better get me out.

BILL. Boy, this'll be great, eh, Perc old boy?

PERCIVAL. It'll be the cat's pajamas, I'll say.

BILL [*Slapping him on the back*]. Pajamas is right, old boy. Bah-jove, you're improving. Another month's lessons under me and you will be talking American too.

[*Quick curtain.*]

ACT II

TIME: *Three days later.*

PLACE: *Same as Act I.*

SCENE: *As the curtain rises Bill and Percival are seen together upon the divan. Both are laughing as if they had a good joke.*

BILL. Anyway, you will have to admit that he is getting off with it in great style.

PERCIVAL. Rawther too well. Bah-jove, he makes a dashing looking widow.

BILL. I told you he could do it. You just as well pay me now. You are bound to lose.

PERCIVAL. Not yet. The party has today and tomorrow to go. He might slip up before then.

BILL. He talked this morning as if he was going to quit this afternoon.

PERCIVAL. If he quits then the bet is off.

BILL. Oh, no. That wasn't in the bargain.

PERCIVAL. Sure it was, old chap. It wouldn't be fair to take my money if he quits before the party is up.

BILL. Then I am going to see that he doesn't quit. I intend to get that twenty-five dollars.

PERCIVAL [*Laughing*]. It's too bad he had to miss this party. These American girls are extremely charming.

BILL. You ought to think so. The whole bunch of them have fallen for you.

PERCIVAL. Oh, I say . . .

[*Just here Jed enters dressed in the character of a middle-aged widow. He has on a hat as if ready to go out. Bill sees him and begins grinning.*]

BILL [*With affected politeness*]. Ah, my dear Mrs. Penny! Your beauty enchants me so that I fain would pour out my love for you on bended knees.

WIDOW [*Coming forward*]. Oh, shut up.

PERCIVAL. You're positively great in that outfit.

WIDOW. Listen. I'm quitting this foolishness. Which one of you is taking me home?

BILL. You can't quit on us like that.

WIDOW. I'm doing it whether I can or not.

BILL [*Pleading*]. But if you quit I lose my bet with Percy, see. And I have to pay him twenty-five dollars.

WIDOW. I don't care if you lose a hundred dollars. I am quitting just the same.

BILL. And if you do I shall tell the whole thing to Boots and her father.

WIDOW. You wouldn't dare.

BILL. Wouldn't I? For twenty-five dollars I would commit murder in these times.

WIDOW. And if you tell, I intend to commit murder.

BILL [*To Percival*]. You just as well get a piece of paper for me to make my last will, Percy, old boy.

WIDOW. Are you serious about telling?

BILL. Certainly I am. Percival says he won't pay me unless you aren't recognized until tomorrow night, and he just won twenty dollars from me Tuesday. You can make out until tomorrow night.

WIDOW [*Suddenly*]. What if I get fired?

BILL. How about that, Percy?

PERCIVAL. Of course, if you get fired without being recognized I guess I shall have to pay.

WIDOW. Then watch me get fired.

[*Jane and Mary enter.*]

JANE. Oh, Mrs. Penny, I want to congratulate you upon the success with which you have helped Boots get off her party. Everything is perfect.

MARY. And Boots says you planned it.

WIDOW. Thanks. I'm glad you are enjoying yourselves.

MARY. That picnic was an inspiration. It will be loads of fun. So much more than a formal dinner.

BILL. I should say so.

JANE [*To Percival*]. Come on, you.

BILL. Where to now?

JANE. You and Mary come on and find out. [*She takes Percival by the arm and they leave.*]

BILL. Come on, Mary. Let's be nice little sheep and follow the leader. [*They leave out too just as Boots enters at the rear.*]

BOOTS [*Determined*]. I just called up and found that I

could still get an orchestra to play for my dance tonight.

WIDOW [*Calmly*]. I told you that your father had no money to spend in hiring an orchestra to play for your private dance.

BOOTS. And who are you to be dictating to me?

WIDOW. Your father put me in charge of things. I repeat that the phonograph and radio will be sufficient to dance by.

BOOTS [*Flaring up*]. I shall not have you spoiling my party any longer. I shall get Daddy to fire you at once.

WIDOW. Nothing could please me better.

BOOTS. You want to quit, then?

WIDOW. Yes. I don't care to be companion or governess to any girl who is so selfish that she will not even consider her father's financial circumstances, but who just spends and spends to make a big show even if it bankrupts him.

BOOTS. I'm not selfish. [*Prof. enters.*]

WIDOW. Perhaps you have a better name for it.

PROF. What is the trouble now?

BOOTS. I want you to fire her. I am not going to stand for her dictating to me, and spoiling my party any longer.

PROF. What has she done?

BOOTS. What! What hasn't she done? She insisted on inviting that dumb Englishman and Bill Thompson at the last minute.

WIDOW. You owed it to them after the way you treated them the other night.

PROF. Certainly you did.

BOOTS. And she wasn't content to change my formal dinner to a picnic on the lawn, but now she refuses to allow me to hire an orchestra for my dance. You have got to fire her. [*She bolts out of the room in a huff.*]

WIDOW. Well, Mr. Boyd, I guess I had better quit.

PROF [*Greatly concerned*]. By all means not. You are doing nicely.

WIDOW. But my plans seem to irritate her no matter what I suggest.

PROF. They are fine. The young people are having the time of their lives.

WIDOW. But your daughter doesn't like them.

PROF. [*Shrugging his shoulders*]. Don't pay any attention

to her. She just isn't used to having anyone tell her what to do and what not to do.

WIDOW. Anyway I think I had better go.

PROF. But, my dear Mrs. Penny, I implore you to remain. You are doing exactly as I have wanted someone to do for a long time.

WIDOW. But I . . .

PROF [*Interrupting*]. Now don't say you cannot. If it is a matter of wages—

WIDOW. No, no, it is not a matter of wages.

PROF. I admire the way you handle Boots. I never have seen her obey anyone like this before. Now if I had told her to have a picnic party she would have had a formal dinner just to keep from doing what I told her to.

WIDOW. The trouble is you are not positive. You give in to her whims.

PROF. I realize that, and that is why I insist upon you remaining. [*Just here Stevens enters with his new wife. The wife is a rather prim lady who likes to talk more than anyone else on any subject raised.*]

STEVENS. Hello, hello. Having callers today?

PROF [*Turning*]. Why hello, Albert. Certainly I am. Come on in.

STEVENS. Just dropped in to show the wife off.

PROF [*Bowing to Mrs. Stevens*]. How do you do, Mrs. Stevens. You two are enjoying married life, I presume?

MRS. S. [*Giggling*]. Oh, yes. It is just wonderful. I never had an idea there was so much real pleasure in married life. [*The widow turns to go.*]

PROF [*Calling to her*]. Just a minute, Mrs. Penny, I want you to meet my friends. Mrs. Stevens this is Mrs. Penny.

MRS. S. [*Gushing*]. Oh, I'm so glad to meet you Mrs. Penny.

WIDOW. How do you do?

MRS. S. My husband told me you were here taking care of Mr. Boyd's daughter. I know it must be such fun having a grown daughter to manage.

WIDOW. Er-uh Yes. It is interesting to say the least.

PROF [*Interrupting*]. And this is my old friend, Mr. Stevens, Mrs. Penny.

STEVENS. I'm delighted to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Penny.

WIDOW. How do you do?

STEVENS. I am sure you shall be quite an aid to Albert.

MRS. STEVENS. I shall have to get your advice about managing children. [*She looks at Stevens and giggles.*] Just in case—you understand.

WIDOW [*Nonplussed*]. Yes, uh—why certainly. I shall be glad to tell you all I know.

MRS. S. That will be fine. You have children of your own, of course?

WIDOW. Oh, no. I don't have any.

MRS. S. Now that's too bad. How in the world did you come to know so much about managing them then?

WIDOW. Oh, you just have to use common sense and be positive. [*Trying to get away.*] But I must beg to be excused. I have to go up to my room.

MRS. S. That is fine. I was dying for you to ask me to go up with you. I wanted to see your clothes. I know you have some lovely lingerie.

WIDOW [*Trying to find his way out of a predicament*]. Well, now—I'm sorry I don't have time to show them to you now. I just remember that I have to go down to the kitchen to give some instructions to the cook.

MRS. S. That's even better. I want to get your advice about cooking. [*Looking towards Stevens with adoration.*] Albert does like good things to eat, and I am trying to find out some delightful dishes for him. [*The Widow's face takes on a hopeless expression, but there is no way out. She turns and leaves the room with Mrs. Stevens beside her.*]

MRS. S. Now I have a recipe for pastry that I know . . . [*Her voice dies away as they disappear.*]

STEVENS. Mrs. Penny seems to be quite a remarkable lady.

PROF [*Enthusiastic*]. Indeed she is. She has been here only a day and a half and has already made herself indispensable.

STEVENS. Seems to be a capable sort. A stout, emphatic looking person. Gives one the impression of mannishness almost.

PROF. I was struck by the same thing. And quite a remarkable thing about it is that although Boots fusses about some things, she does exactly as Mrs. Penny says. I wish I had found her a long time ago. I'm sure Boots would have been better off.

STEVENS. Ned, you ought to get married again. You weren't married long enough the first time to realize what it is like. I would like to see you married to Audrey Hemingway.

PROF. I'm afraid to consider it, Albert. I talked it over with Boots and she is bitterly opposed to my remarrying. I suppose I owe it to her not to.

STEVENS. I don't see it that way, Ned. No child should stand in the way of a parent's happiness. You have already given her several years of your life. She will soon be gone, and then you will be left alone.

PROF [*Meditating*]. Well, maybe I shall still have time then.

STEVENS. Mrs. Penny wouldn't make a bad wife either, would she? Perhaps Boots would not be opposed to her.

PROF [*Interested*]. I had thought of that. Mrs. Penny is certainly capable, and probably would make a better mother for Boots than Mrs. Hemingway. But do you think it would be all right?

STEVENS. Certainly it would be all right. What would be wrong with it if she is a nice lady? It is your life, isn't it? What do you care what anyone else thinks?

PROF [*Thinking*]. Yes, maybe you're right.

[*Mrs. Stevens and the Widow re-enter.*]

MRS. S. And you must call on us real soon. I am going to have you over to dinner with us.

WIDOW. That is so nice of you, I'm sure.

MRS. S. Albert, dear, we must be going. I have a lot of things to get in town.

PROF. You two must drop in again soon.

MRS. S. Oh, we shall. And you are coming out to dinner tomorrow night with us. We shall have a table of bridge afterwards. [*Winking.*] I have invited Mrs. Hemingway over to make a fourth.

PROF. That will be nice.

MRS. S. See you then. [*She waves good-bye, and they leave.*]

PROF. Good-bye. [*He turns to see the Widow about to go through the other door. He watches her go and nods his head to show he is interested, straightens his tie and walks over to the mirror. He mutters approvingly.*] Sex appeal. [*Smiles.*] Maybe she was right.

[*Laughter and voices are heard outside and Bill and Percival enter with Jane and Mary. They call out hello, etc., to Prof.*]

PROF. Oh, hello. Come in.

BILL. It is a great party, Professor.

JANE. I'll say. We have been having more fun than anything.

PERCIVAL. It's what I would call the raspberries. [*He grins at his saying. The others laugh loudly, and Prof looks blankly. Percival, sensing he has said the wrong thing looks towards Bill.*]

BILL [*Coming to his rescue quickly*]. He means berries, Professor.

PERCIVAL. That's right. It's quite the berries. [*Prof smiles.*]

BILL. You see he is having a time learning to speak American.

PROF. I see. Well, I'm glad to hear you are enjoying yourselves.

MARY. That picnic and swimming party was a great idea. How about joining us in the swim?

PROF. Oh, I haven't had on a bathing suit in years.

MARY. All the more reason you should try it. You would feel ten years younger.

BILL. Righto, Professor. I'll challenge you to a hundred yard dash.

JANE [*Pleading*]. Yes, do. How about it?

PROF [*Interested*]. I'll do it!

MARY. Oh, goody.

BILL. Bravo, Professor!

PERCIVAL. That's sporting, old chap.

JANE. Oh! And let's get Mrs. Penny to go along too.

MARY. Yes. Come on, Professor and let's ask her now.
[*Bill and Percival exchange sly glances.*]

PROF. Wonder if she swims?

BILL. Excellently. Don't let her fool you.

MARY. Are you sure she does?

BILL. Absolutely certain. I have seen her do some fancy diving too.

JANE. Come on then. [*The two girls and the Professor leave. Bill and Percival face each other laughing.*]

BILL. Boy, I would like to see his face when they ask him that.

PERCIVAL. That would be jolly, bah-jove. [*They are laughing heartily when Boots enters.*]

BOOTS [*Smiling pleasantly*]. What's all the fun? Can't I hear the joke?

BILL. Unh-uh, unh, uh! I'm afraid it would make the little girl blush.

BOOTS. I'm blush proof.

BILL [*Teasing*]. But this joke was like the driver's entrance on the left hand side of the old model T Ford.

BOOTS. How was that?

BILL. For men only. [*They laugh.*]

BOOTS. Smarty.

PERCIVAL. I say, Miss Boyd, this is a dashingly clevah party you're giving.

BOOTS [*Pleased*]. Enjoying it?

BILL. I'll say! You know, I didn't think you had it in you to be real human like this. I just saw myself standing around in a tuxedo, wearing my adam's apple raw on a high collar, and playing thimble all evening. Never thought we would have all this fun.

BOOTS. It's nice of you to say it.

BILL. Boy, how I wish old Jed was here to enjoy it. You know he was all washed up when he didn't get to see you the other night?

BOOTS. Was he?

BILL [*In a grand manner*]. Lady he was in tears.

BOOTS [*Smiling*]. Oh, you're crazy.

BILL. No, honest. That boy is wild about you.

BOOTS. Then he should have been here on time.

BILL. But my dear lady of the golden [*brown as the case may be.*] tresses, I have tried to explain that the fault was all mine. Why old Jed ran two miles after that gas and all the way back. Why when he got back to the car his tongue was hanging out of his mouth like a fox hound's.

BOOTS. Oh, you're crazy.

BILL. Isn't that right, Perc, old boy—hanging out at least a foot?

PERCIVAL. Well, I would say you were *substantially* correct.

BILL. See there! Lady you will have to argue a right smart before St. Peter will let you by the golden gate for making Jed suffer like that.

BOOTS. You make me feel terrible. [*Confiding.*] You know, I was really crazy about him too. Only he wouldn't give in an inch about nothing.

BILL [*As if in despair*]. There she goes admitting she loves him. Why wasn't I speaking for myself, John? Come to think of it, I'll do it anyway. How about clearing out so I can talk to the lady, Percy, old chap.

PERCIVAL. I had already sensed your bashfulness and was on my way. [*He goes out.*]

BOOTS [*Smiling*]. You're never serious a minute.

BILL. Now I am going to be. How about a date for the swim?

BOOTS. I had half-way promised Howard.

BILL. Oh, nertz!

BOOTS. That's right.

BILL. What's right?

BOOTS. Nutz is his name. Howard Nutz.

BILL. No, no. I said nertz. Any kind of nertz.

BOOTS. Now was that nice?

BILL. Maybe not, but the Nutz fellow is all nuts—going about with a chip on his shoulder as if he owned you and the place around here.

BOOTS. There now, you're jealous.

BILL. Then you had better give me that date if you don't want me to commit murder.

BOOTS. Murder?

BILL. Yes. If you go to the lake with Nutz this afternoon I intend to drown him. And, by the way he is the second one I've threatened to murder today.

BOOTS [*Pretending she is shocked*]. My, you are desperate.

BILL [*Folding his arms across his breast in imitation of an Indian*]. Humph! Heap big Chief Drown-Em-In-The-Lake. Heap bad man.

BOOTS [*Laughing heartily*]. You win.

BILL. Lady, you saved my life. For that I shall have to kiss you once just for old Jed.

BOOTS. Hold on, not so fast. Let Jed kiss for himself.

BILL. Alas, lady, you must go to your grave a virgin. Jed wouldn't have the nerve.

BOOTS. That's why I like him.

BILL. And I thought all ladies were pining away to be kissed.

BOOTS. Then you're still learning. [*Starting off.*] But I must be going. I'll see you after a while. [*She leaves.*]

BILL. Righto, kid. [*He turns in time to see the Widow poke her head through the door to peep furtively, and seeing no one in the room comes in. Bill grins at him and then strikes a grandiloquent manner.*]

BILL. Ah, fair maid. Your beauty ravishes me, and speech almost deserts me.

WIDOW [*Furiously*]. You pipe down. Why the sam hill did you send those idiots in there to get me to go swimming?

BILL [*Grinning*]. It was their idea. Not mine.

WIDOW. You told them I could swim. They won't take any excuse.

BILL [*Quoting*]. Yes, I'll admit it. I chopped down the cherry tree with my little hatchet. I cannot tell a lie.

WIDOW [*Angrily*]. Fool!

BILL. What's wrong with you going swimming?

WIDOW [*Exasperated*]. Wrong?

BILL. Put on your bathing suit, and give them an eye full of feminine charm. Those legs would ravish the professor.

WIDOW. Go jump in the lake.

BILL. I might drown.

WIDOW. You don't think I would cry, I hope.

BILL. But think of Boots. She would be saddened for life.

WIDOW [*Seriously*]. I'm getting out of here. You tell them I had to go to town.

BILL. I'll not do it. If you quit I am going to tell them the whole secret.

WIDOW. You better not.

BILL. Boy, I would love it.

WIDOW. But I tell you they insist on me swimming.

BILL. Then go on and swim. You could put in a few pads [*Motioning with hands.*] at advantageous spots to help the cause, couldn't you?

WIDOW. No.

BILL. Then, think up an excuse.

WIDOW. They won't take any.

BILL [*Grinning*]. And I thought you were a lady. Pretend you have a headache. Any lady would have thought of that a long time ago.

WIDOW. I'm getting out of here. That's what I am going to do.

BILL. And I shall tell on you, and what would your chances be with Boots then?

WIDOW. I don't have any chance anyway.

BILL. Don't you! Boy, she just told me an earfull about how she loved you.

WIDOW [*Interested*]. She did?

BILL. That she did. And I have a date with her this afternoon to keep her from being with that Nutz fellow, and I am going to court her for you. When I finish talking to her and you return from your *extended trip* she is going to call you up straight and propose to you.

WIDOW. Like heck she will.

BILL. Sure, she will. If you will just go on and play the widow so I can win that twenty-five smackers from Percival. You see I recommended you and my reputation is at stake. If you were to desert now, what would they think of me? I just a while ago gave the professor my word of honor that you would stick through thick and thin.

WIDOW. Of all the crazy things I ever got into this is the worst. I have been dying for a cigarette for three days.

BILL. If a cigarette is all, here's one. [*Hands Widow one. She takes it and starts to feel in usual place for pocket to get a match. Bill sees him.*]

BILL. No pockets? That's another reason for not wanting to be a woman. Here's a match. [*Widow takes the match and has just lighted the cigarette when voices are heard approaching.*]

BILL. Look out! Better duck it. [*Widow looks frantically for a place to put it, starts to throw it on floor but stops and Bill reaches over, takes the cigarette from her fingers.*]

BILL. Be nonchalant—smoke a Murad. [*He is calmly smoking when the others enter. The Widow goes through the door when Jane and Mary enter.*]

JANE. Oh, hello. Where is Percival?

MARY. We have lost him, and can't find him anywhere.

BILL [*Bantering*]. Why worry about that dumb Englishman, when you have a genuine American from the famous Mayflower stock right here at your service.

JANE [*Laughs with Mary*]. Oh, you're so crazy, Bill. Don't you ever get serious?

BILL [*Assuming a hurt dignity*]. Certainly I get serious. But do you expect a fellow to stand aside and allow himself to pine away in sorrow and neglect while every girl on this party goes wild about a bally Englishman?

JANE. Really, isn't he the cutest thing?

MARY. And he says "bah-jove," and "ripping" so funny like.

BILL [*Imitating Percival.*]. Then bah-jove I think I shall take up talking the bally English language, and maybe I can get some attention.

JANE. Ah, but Boots just told us you had a date with her.

MARY. So you can't blame us for not wasting any time on you.

BILL. There you go, and that Englishman can have a dozen dates and still every girl here tries to edge in.

JANE [*Laughing*]. But he says such funny things.

BILL. If I ever have a son I am going to name him Percival Reginald.

JANE [*Laughing*]. Why?

BILL. I want him to be a boxer.

JANE. I don't see the connection between the name Percival Reginald and a boxer.

BILL. Think of all the practice he will get when he starts to school with a name like that. [*They laugh.*]

MARY. Oh, come on, silly. [*They start out just as Mandy comes in. Bill sees her.*]

BILL. Hello, Mandy. Be sure to have some of those cookies out at the picnic. They were great.

MANDY [*Pleased*]. I'll sho' do it, Mr. Bill. I done cooked a big pan full. [*Laughs gleefully.*]

BILL. That a girl, Mandy! And if they are as good as those the other night you can hang up three stockings Christmas. [*He disappears.*]

MANDY. Now, dat Mr. Bill is sho' a fine young gen-man. [*Place for Howard and other girls to enter if added characters are wanted.*]

[*Boots enters.*]

BOOTS. Mandy, I have been looking for you.

MANDY. What is it, honey?

BOOTS. Father says I have been rude to Mrs. Penny and that I ought to apologize. Do you think I had?

MANDY. Well, now, honey, I do think you ought to treat her a little better. She seems to be doing all right.

BOOTS. But she bosses me around. Just orders me like I was her child.

MANDY. Well, you know, Marse Ned he done hired her to look after you, and maybe you been a little hard-headed.

BOOTS. I guess maybe I have, Mandy.

MANDY. Maybe if you wuz to be kinda nice like to her she would be different.

BOOTS [*Dubiously*]. I'll try it. Maybe I have been too headstrong. [*Flaring up.*] But I don't like to be told what I've got to do.

MANDY [*Coaxingly*]. You try being nice to her. I think she'll be all right. You know she ain't bothered up with my kitchen at all.

BOOTS. Uh-huh. So that's the reason you like her?

MANDY. Well, I think you will like her after you know

her better. [*She turns to go.*] Marse Ned would be mighty glad if you would.

BOOTS. All right, Mandy. I am going to try being nice to her for a change and see if it works.

MANDY [*Turning near the door*]. But if she don't treat you right, chile, you just come to your Mandy and tell her.

BOOTS. I'll do it, Mandy. [*Mandy disappears, and the Widow comes in with a suitcase. She tries to slip through the room and is almost at the opposite door when Boots turns around.*]

BOOTS. Where are you going?

WIDOW [*Suddenly stopping*]. I—I'm going away.

BOOTS. Not for good?

WIDOW. Yes, I'm quitting.

BOOTS [*With concern*]. No, don't.

WIDOW. Tell your father that I won't be back.

BOOTS [*Going up to her impulsively, and taking the suitcase from her hands*]. Now please don't go.

WIDOW. I really must. [*Reaches for the suitcase again.*]

BOOTS. Just a minute. Why do you want to go?

WIDOW [*Searching for an excuse*]. I don't think I am needed.

BOOTS. Certainly you are needed. We couldn't do without you.

WIDOW [*Surprised at this turn of events*]. But you have been quarreling at every suggestion I have made since I have been here.

BOOTS. I know. I have been a brute, and I realize that you have made my party a grand success. [*Suddenly bursting into tears and throwing herself upon the widow's breast.*] And I have been such a little beast.

[*The widow is dumbfounded, embarrassed and nervous.*]

WIDOW [*Trying to make the most of the situation*]. There—there, now! Don't cry. It's all right.

[*Bill enters and seeing the situation, slaps his hand over his mouth to keep from bursting into laughter. Jed catches his eye, and looks sheepish.*]

BOOTS [*Still sobbing with her head buried on the Widow's breast*]. Can you ever forgive me? I promise not to be rude again if you will stay.

BILL [*Coming forward*]. Eh, eh! What's this? Mrs. Penny is not leaving?

BOOTS [*Raising her head and applying a handkerchief*]. Yes. Please help me persuade her to stay. Father would be terribly upset at me, because she was leaving on account of my rudeness.

[*The Widow gives Bill an imploring look.*]

BILL [*Ignoring it*]. Why, certainly you musn't leave, Mrs. Penny. You musn't even think of it. [*To Boots.*] Why I am sure that now you have apologized she will not even consider leaving.

BOOTS [*Brightening and turning to the Widow*]. Will you stay?

WIDOW [*Undecided but Bill makes a gesture meant to convey that he will tell if she doesn't stay*]. Yes—Yes. I suppose so.

BOOTS [*Impulsively kisses the Widow's cheek much to her embarrassment*]. I'm so glad. We shall be the best of friends.

BILL [*Enjoying the situation*]. Ah! And I would have sold my birthright for that kiss. Why wasn't I born a widow?

BOOTS [*Picking up the suitcase*]. Here, I'll take this back to your room, and I shall tell Father you aren't going away. [*She goes out. Bill is almost convulsed while the Widow gives him a terrible look.*]

WIDOW. I could gladly kill you.

BILL. Unh-uh! Unh-uh! Remember the Ten Commandments. Thou shalt not kill.

WIDOW. I don't think the Lord had in mind any such fool as you are when he made them.

BILL. Oh, now come on and play the game through. You can quit as soon as this house party is over tomorrow, and I won't say a word. You started out on it for a lark, and I bet twenty-five good smackers you would keep them fooled.

WIDOW. It is easy enough for you to say go ahead, go ahead. But you don't understand. Her father is beginning to act goofy about me.

BILL [*Grinning broadly*]. Don't tell me so!

WIDOW. I'm expecting him to begin making love to me

every time he gets near me. I have spent all morning dodging him.

BILL. Oh, boy, I must tell that to Perc. It'll positively slay him.

WIDOW. If you do I intend to give you a good beating.

BILL. This will be worth a beating.

WIDOW. But what am I to do?

BILL [*Pretending embarrassment*]. Now don't ask me.

WIDOW. He will certainly find out if he starts making love to me.

BILL. Slap him and make him keep his hands in place.
[*Laughs.*]

WIDOW. Fool!

BILL. Call on your past experience. Do what all the girls you ever proposed to did. Put your finger in the corner of your mouth like this, pretend to be terribly embarrassed, and say, "Oh, Professor, this is so sudden," and then put him off.

WIDOW. But they are beginning to ask such embarrassing questions. To cap the stacks that Mrs. Stevens wanted to see my *lingerie*. [*Bill bursts into laughter.*] Next thing I expect is for some of them to be sent up to sleep with me.

BILL [*Pretending to be shocked*]. Oh, Mrs. Penny!

[*Suddenly furious, the Widow makes a pass at Bill with her fist but he dodges, and they grapple.*]

BILL. Cut it out, woman.

WIDOW. I'm leaving this place and you're going to promise not to tell. [*They fall with Bill on top. He sits astride of her and holds her down.*]

WIDOW [*Puffing away*]. These dad-burn skirts. Just wait till I get them off.

BILL. Think how the Professor would look if he saw you with them off.

WIDOW [*Struggling*]. Get off me.

BILL. Not until you promise to keep your head.

WIDOW. I don't promise anything until you agree not to tell.

BILL. I guess we had better compromise then. Think how shocked the Professor would be if he saw you in this position. And I know *my* reputation would not be worth a cent.

WIDOW. Then promise you won't tell.

BILL. Me promise? Say, who has got who down, I'd like to know?

WIDOW [*Still angry*]. Just wait till I get up from here.

[*Noises are heard approaching.*]

BILL [*Jumping up and attempting to help the widow to her feet.*] Get up quick. Here someone comes.

[*Boots and the Professor enter and take in the situation.*]

BILL [*Gallantly assisting the Widow to rise*]. My dear Mrs. Penny, I sincerely hope you didn't injure yourself seriously.

PROF [*Crossing over quickly to assist*]. What happened? Are you hurt?

BOOTS. Did you fall?

BILL. Mrs. Penny had the ill fortune to trip and fall.

PROF [*Very solicitous*]. I hope you aren't badly injured.

WIDOW. No, no, thanks. I'm all right. Just a slight fall.

PROF [*Relieved*]. I'm so glad you aren't badly hurt.

BILL. Professor, I think you better assist Mrs. Penny to her room. I doubt if she will feel like joining the swimming party now.

BOOTS. I shall go ahead and prepare her bed. [*She leaves out.*]

PROF. I am so sorry you won't be able to take in the swimming. Are you sure you won't be able to go?

WIDOW [*Starting off and affecting a limp*]. Oh no, I positively couldn't. I have hurt my leg.

BILL. By all means then you shouldn't walk without assistance.

PROF. Yes, to be sure. Just catch hold of my shoulder and I shall assist you.

WIDOW [*With a look at Bill as if to say I could kill you*]. No, I'll be all right.

BILL. A woman is bashful like that, Professor. Go ahead and put your arm around her so she won't have to bear all the weight on that injured limb. Or maybe I had better help.

PROF [*Quickly putting his arm about the Widow, and is assisting her when Mrs. Hemingway appears in the opposite door.*] No, no. I can take care of her.

MRS. H. [*Not understanding the situation*]. Um-m-h! I beg your pardon.

BILL. Oh, it is all right, Mrs. Hemingway. Come right in. The Widow just fell and injured her leg—I mean her hip, and the Professor is assisting her to her room.

PROF. [*Suddenly stopping on hearing her voice. He releases the Widow and turns embarrassed*]. Ah—yes. Mrs. Penny had a dreadful fall, and won't be able to join us at the swimming party. We are about ready to leave now. Won't you join us?

MRS. H. No, no. I don't swim, thank you. You just go ahead. If Mrs. Penny is not going I shall remain here and keep her company.

PROF. Well, that will be nice of you. I'm sure Mrs. Penny will appreciate having company, eh, Mrs. Penny?

WIDOW. Eh—uh—yes. Certainly.

PROF. Then you will excuse me, I must be getting ready.

MRS. H. To be sure. You men run right along. We women know how to entertain ourselves. [*Prof and Bill start to go.*]

BILL [*Smiling towards the Widow*]. And be sure to have her tell you about her operation, Mrs. Hemingway. [*Prof. and Bill leave.*]

MRS. H. Come on and have a seat, my dear. I know you must feel like sitting after such a dreadful fall.

WIDOW [*Trying to be polite*]. Yes, yes, thanks. [*They sit.*]

MRS. H. I do hope it isn't serious.

WIDOW. I'm sure it won't be.

MRS. H. [*Launching into a story*]. Now, the day before I was operated on for appendicitis I fell . . . [*Suddenly.*] You don't have appendicitis do you?

WIDOW. Uh—no. No, I . . .

MRS. H. [*Interrupting*]. That's fine. Now as I said, the day before I was operated on I fell and it positively caused my appendix to burst and I had a dreadful time. Why I have a scar right here [*Indicating spot.*] that must be at least six inches long.

WIDOW [*Disgusted, she rises*]. Why my dear, only six inches long? Now when I was operated on they cut me from here to here. [*Indicating all the way across her stomach.*]

MRS. H. [*Rising with astonishment and interest*]. Really! How remarkable. [*She approaches the Widow.*] I never

heard of such an incision. You must show it to me at once.

WIDOW [*A frantic look for a moment as if trying to find a way out, then she meets the situation by throwing her head into the air as if with offended dignity, and turns on her heel*]. Humph! How revolting, Mrs. Hemingway. [*She marches out with head in the air. Mrs. Hemingway stands looking after her for a second, and then says.*]

MRS. H. Humph! Why the cat! As if it wasn't perfectly nice to see an operation scar.

[*Quick Curtain.*]

ACT III

TIME: *The next evening.*

PLACE: *The same.*

SCENE: *As the curtain rises Jane and Howard are seen playing double-solitaire upon the divan, while Mary looks over a comic section of the paper. Jane and Howard play out a couple of cards. Mary drops the paper into her lap.*

MARY. Say, where in the world did Percy and Bill get to all of a sudden?

MARY. They went to town for something.

JANE. They did? All by themselves?

MARY. I think so.

JANE. Well, I like that—not even asking me to go.

HOWARD [*Unpleasantly*]. I don't see what you find so attractive about that pair.

JANE [*Defending*]. Why both of them are cute.

MARY [*To Howard*]. Don't you dare say anything about Percy. [*Putting her finger to her lip.*] Jane is smitten.

JANE. Little you know about it.

MARY. It's in your eyes, honey.

HOWARD. I guess there is no accounting for some people's taste.

JANE. Now, don't be prudish, Howard. Both of them were somewhat strangers and we owed it to them to show them a good time.

HOWARD. You don't have to neglect all the rest of us just to do it.

MARY [*Teasing*]. Law, but we thought you were the next thing to married to Boots, and it wouldn't look nice for us to horn in when it was at her own party.

HOWARD [*Sullenly*]. That's some excuse, when she hasn't given me a minute for the past two days.

JANE. I have felt sorry for you Howard. Bill seems to be giving her the grand rush, and Mary is green with envy.

MARY. It isn't so, and you know it.

JANE. I tell you, you give Mary the rush and that will keep her from vamping Percy, and then I will have a better chance.

HOWARD. I refuse to be a rival to that wise-cracking, Bill Thompson.

JANE. Oh, now don't get sore and spoil the party, Howard.

MARY [*Laughing*]. I tell you, Howard, how about giving the Widow Penny a rush. She seems to be gaining in favor among the boys. Bill and Percy are both about to fall for her.

HOWARD [*Rising in ill humor*]. Now, if you two insist on razzing me I refuse to stay. [*He stalks out.*]

JANE [*Turning up her nose in his direction.*] Humph! He seems to have stepped upon a nettle or something.

MARY. He certainly doesn't like Bill edging in on Boots.

JANE. Do you think Boots really likes Bill?

MARY. I don't think so. She is too desperately in love with Jed.

JANE. I never was so glad of anything in my life than I was when Jed left without seeing her, after the way she treated him the night of the dance.

MARY. And she hasn't heard a word from him either.

JANE. Serves her right. That's Boots' fault. She has had her own way until she thinks she can wrap anybody about her finger and dictate to them like she does to poor Howard.

MARY. Well, Jed was one she couldn't do anything with.

JANE. That's why she liked him so much. No matter how civilized a woman gets she still likes a regular cave man for a lover. She likes to be ruled.

MARY. She seems to have got an over dose of bossing from Mrs. Penny.

JANE. That's different. She will be bossed by a man, but don't let a woman do it or there will be hair-pulling right straight.

MARY [*Interested*]. Say, you know, there is something about Mrs. Penny that reminds me of Jed. In her voice or something.

JANE. That's queer I had noticed it too.

MARY. I guess it is her voice.

JANE. No, I think it is her eyes and nose.

MARY. I thought it her mouth more than her eyes.

JANE. We won't quarrel about it. Maybe it was all of them combined. [*Howard appears in the doorway.*]

HOWARD. Say, how about a little dance? The radio is good right now.

JANE [*She and Mary jump up*]. Coming. [*They hurry out, and Bill sticks his head in at the opposite door and takes a look around, and then turns around and says.*]

BILL. Come on. The coast is clear. [*He enters followed by Percival who carries a hand bag.*] I just rather not have to explain off this handbag.

PERCIVAL. I guess it would be difficult.

BILL [*Suddenly laughing*]. Well, Perc, old chap, it looks like you pay me twenty-five dollars.

PERCY. Bah-jove, I'm getting nervous. I never had an idea he could do it.

BILL. I knew he could. Boy, don't ever bet with your Uncle Dudley. It's just donating, boy—just donating.

PERCIVAL. So it seems. [*Just here the Widow enters from the opposite door. Bill sees her.*]

BILL. We got them all right.

WIDOW. They won't do any good. You're going to take me back to town.

BILL. What's wrong now?

WIDOW. I refuse to go on any further with this thing. The Professor has been trying to get me alone all morning, and I've got a cold from sleeping in that plague-taken gown. It crawled up around my neck and I have frozen and choked to death for the past three nights.

BILL. But I brought your pajamas. I have them inside.

WIDOW. Did you bring me a new razor?

BILL. Sure. But what happened to your razor?

WIDOW. I hid it in the waste basket to keep anyone from seeing it and Mandy threw it into the furnace.

BILL. Your face looks pretty rough. Better hurry along and shave.

WIDOW [*Pleading*]. Come on, Bill, and be a sport. Let me out of this. I tell you I can't go on with it.

BILL. No, I don't either. There is just tonight, and I lose twenty-five dollars if you don't go through with it.

PERCIVAL. I thought you were going to get fired.

WIDOW [*Disconsolately*]. That was no good. I tried everything I knew to get fired. I made Boots mad, and insulted the Professor, and Boots has apologized, and the Professor

has praised me, and now is about to propose.

BILL. Stall him off, do anything for one day longer.

PERCIVAL. I think I shall go look up the girls. [*He starts out.*]

BILL. Tell Boots I'll be there shortly.

PERCIVAL. Righto, old chap. [*He disappears.*]

WIDOW [*Accusingly*]. And I'll say you're a pal. After I got you and Percival an invitation over here you blackmail me into keeping up this foolishness, and then on top of that you have to start making love to my girl. That's a pal for you.

BILL. Oh, calm down! Calm down. Why I courted her for you two whole days, and just started for myself on the third. Surely I got a right to one day out of three.

WIDOW [*Flaring up*]. Well, you making love to her is out if I continue to play the Widow. Either you quit making love to Boots or I quit, and let them find out who I am.

BILL. Oh, all right. I promise. [*Just here Boots enters with thread and needle. She sees the two. She gives Bill a meaning glance and says.*]

BOOTS. Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't know you two were talking.

BILL. Oh, it's all right. Come right in. I just came back from up town. Went over to get some things for Mrs. Penny.

BOOTS. In that bag there?

BILL. Yes.

BOOTS. I see. Oh, Mrs. Penny I have a run in my hose, and I want you to sew it up for me. Here is a needle and thread. [*She hands them to the Widow who takes them because there is no way out. Bill is behind Boots' back grinning.*]

WIDOW. Really, I haven't time right this minute.

BOOTS. Oh, it won't take a second. You can just catch it up right now while I have them on.

BILL [*Clearing his throat loudly*]. Ah-ah-ah! Had I perhaps better retire.

BOOTS [*Sitting down and holding her leg out towards the Widow*]. Why, no, silly. There's nothing private about having a run caught in one's hose.

BILL. Then I shall remain and see how it is performed. This ought to be interesting.

BOOTS. What's interesting about this pray tell?

BILL [*Grinning*]. I might have a run in my sox sometime, and knowing how to fix it might come in handy.

BOOTS [*Turning to the Widow and seeing her standing there with the needle and spool of thread*]. Go ahead and thread the needle, please. I'm in a hurry.

WIDOW [*She is desperate. Trying to thread needle*]. Really, I can't see to thread the needle. I don't have my glasses.

BILL [*Quickly*]. Here, I'll thread it for you. [*He takes them and threads the needle and hands it back. The Widow gives him a killing look.*]

BOOTS. Oh, I didn't know you wore glasses.

WIDOW [*Haltingly*]. I—I—That is, I don't wear them except for tedious things like sewing.

BOOTS. Then I guess I shall have to do it myself. [*She takes the needle and thread from Bill and gets up to leave.*] By the way, I have two friends coming to spend the night with me and we don't have enough beds. Will it be all right for me to share yours with you tonight, Mrs. Penny? [*Bill has walked over towards the door and when Boots says this the Widow looks over at him with a frantic expression and Bill slaps his hand over his mouth to smother a laugh and darts out of the door. Boots turns to see what happened, and sees him dart out. She turns towards the Widow with a questioning look.*]

BOOTS. What was wrong with him, I wonder?

WIDOW. I'm wondering myself.

BOOTS. I'm sure you won't mind having me sleep with you?

WIDOW. Uh—uh—Why, no. You may have my room. I am spending the night with friends in town anyway.

BOOTS [*Relieved*]. Then that simplifies matters.

WIDOW. There is something I have wanted to talk to you about.

BOOTS. Yes.

WIDOW. I see you have been with that young man who just left here quite a bit for the past few days.

BOOTS. What of it?

WIDOW. I don't think he is the kind of young man that you should fall in love with.

BOOTS. I think he is nice.

WIDOW. He may be nice, but still I don't think you should take up any time with him.

BOOTS. I'm sure he is all right, or Jed Harding would never have introduced him to me.

WIDOW [*Pleased*]. Oh, so you know Jed very well?

BOOTS [*Interested*]. Yes. He was the one recommended you.

WIDOW. Why yes, I believe that is right.

BOOTS. Do you know where he went on this trip?

WIDOW. Why no, I do not.

BOOTS. Well, I think he was horrid to go off and not write me a word.

WIDOW. Do you care whether he writes or not?

BOOTS. Yes, I do. [*Confiding*]. In fact I am afraid I am in love with him.

WIDOW [*About to forget*]. Really. [*Remembering her part*]. I wonder if he knows it?

BOOTS. Maybe not. You see, I acted foolishly and tried to be stubborn and he wouldn't stand for it.

WIDOW [*Assuming a critical attitude*]. That must have been hateful of him.

BOOTS [*Defending*]. But it wasn't. I would have hated him if he had let me run over him. He wouldn't have been a real man if he had.

WIDOW. I see. Then you should call him up the minute he returns and apologize.

BOOTS. I intend to. I would write him and apologize if I knew where to write to.

WIDOW. Then I shall try to find out for you.

BOOTS. Oh, will you?

WIDOW. I'll try.

BOOTS. But no one seems to know where he went. Not even Bill and Percival, and they are his close friends.

WIDOW. I'll see what I can do.

BOOTS. I hope you do.

WIDOW. And you will promise not to have many dates with Bill?

BOOTS. Why are you so interested in that?

WIDOW. I have every reason to mind.

BOOTS. Indeed!

WIDOW. Yes—indeed!

BOOTS. What are some of them, pray?

WIDOW [*Stumbling for a reply*]. Well—uh—well, I was hired by your father to look after you for one.

BOOTS [*Stubbornly*]. He didn't hire you to make dates for me.

WIDOW. But you aren't going to have any more dates with Bill.

BOOTS. I am. And I have to go sew up these hose. I am just going to move my things over in your room. [*She starts to pick up the suitcase.*] And since I am going up I shall just take this along for you.

WIDOW [*Frantically grabbing at the bag as Boots lifts it*]. No. No, I'll take it. Never mind.

BOOTS. Oh, I'll take it. I'm going right up there now. [*She starts off and the Widow pulls frantically at the bag. It flies open and the contents fall out upon the floor. There is a razor, a pair of B.V.D.'s and a pair of men's pajamas.*]

BOOTS. Oh, I'm so sorry. I'll get them up.

[*The Widow looks for a second paralyzed as Boots stoops to pick them up, then she stoops rapidly and attempts to cram them back herself.*]

WIDOW. No, no. I'll get them.

BOOTS [*Picking up the pajamas and looking at them*]. Why, how funny. These are men's pajamas.

WIDOW. Yes—I—I wear men's pajamas almost all the time. I find them warmer.

BOOTS [*Looks closely at the pajamas, her eyes widen and she looks up at the Widow who does not see her as she is busy getting the things back into the bag. Boots looks at her suspiciously for a second and nods her head understandingly*]. Oh, I see—Yes, I think I understand.

Widow [*Catching the note in her voice looks up at her*]. Understand what?

BOOTS [*Rising from her knees*]. That men's pajamas are warmer than women's. [*She hands them back to the Widow who puts them into the bag.*]

WIDOW. Oh, yes, indeed . . . Much warmer.

BOOTS [*Anxious to go*]. Yes, I guess so. [*She leaves hurriedly, and the Widow stands looking at her with a puzzled expression.*]

WIDOW. Oh, my gosh! Wonder if she suspects anything?

[*The Professor enters, and sees her with the bag. He is at once concerned.*]

PROF. Why, my dear Mrs. Penny, you are not going away are you?

WIDOW. Oh, no. Not now. I just had some things brought up.

PROF [*Relieved*]. That relieves me very much. Won't you come over and have a seat. I have something I wish very much to ask you. [*He motions her to the divan.*]

WIDOW [*Hesitating*]. Well—really I have to be getting about my duties.

PROF. Oh, I won't keep you long. There is something I have had on my mind for the past two days which I just must ask you.

WIDOW [*Nervously*]. But, wouldn't tomorrow do as well?

PROF. No, I must ask you today. [*He takes his seat and motions to the Widow to sit beside him. There is nothing else to do, so she takes the seat gingerly and at some distance from the Professor. He slides a little nearer so as to be able to talk more privately and the Widow edges towards the front of the divan and seems perched ready for instant flight in case of emergency.*]

WIDOW. Yes, sir.

PROF. Of course what I have to say to you may seem a little strange to you coming from one who has only known you for a few days . . .

WIDOW [*Very nervous*]. Uh—yes, sir.

PROF. But you realize, of course, that I am a widower and that I have a daughter who needs a mother who can look after her and advise her.

WIDOW. Er—yes, sir.

PROF. Now, I realize that you have done very nicely since you came here and have been able to work wonders with my daughter. But you realize that even though she does respect

you, that she would respect a woman who was my wife a great deal more. [*He leans over towards her in his earnestness and she fidgets on the edge of the divan.*]

WIDOW. No, sir—that is, yes sir.

PROF. Now, if I could get a wife who would come into my home and take the interest in Boots that you have shown don't you think it would be advisable for me to marry again, not only for my own sake, but also for the sake of my daughter?

WIDOW. I don't know, I'm sure—I doubt if it would.

PROF. I'm sorry to hear you say that, for I have great respect for your judgment. Would your answer be the same regardless of the woman I had in mind for a wife?

WIDOW. Well, I should say that the woman would have something to do with the case.

PROF. Then what would you say if I said the woman was [*He hesitates slightly and looks at her.*] Mrs. Hemingway?

WIDOW [*So relieved that she is almost jubilant*]. Mrs. Hemingway! Ah—er—I should say fine. By all means marry her. She would be a splendid choice.

PROF [*Flattered*]. Thank you, I appreciate your saying so. But there is one drawback.

WIDOW. Yes.

PROF. Boots doesn't like the idea of my marrying again, and especially Mrs. Hemingway. I had thought that by you coming here she would become used to having another woman in the house, and would see that it was not so bad as she thought. But she seems as opposed as ever.

WIDOW. Are you sure that she would be opposed still?

PROF. Yes. I talked with her this morning.

WIDOW. Then I shall speak with her some time soon.

PROF [*Rising and extending his hand*]. How can I ever thank you, Mrs. Penny.

WIDOW. Oh, don't mention it. I am glad to help you get married to her.

PROF. It is nice of you to say that, when you realize that it will mean I cannot keep you any longer.

WIDOW [*Almost gleefully*]. You—you mean I can—that I am fired?

PROF. Oh, no. Not yet. I want you to stay by all means

until after the wedding.

WIDOW [*Face falling*]. Oh.

PROF. Why, you aren't displeased with your work are you?

WIDOW. Oh, no. I just thought you meant now. When will the wedding be?

PROF. That will largely depend upon the attitude Boots takes.

WIDOW. Leave her to me, I shall attend to that.

PROF. I shall depend upon you. [*He turns and leaves the room, and the Widow closes her eyes and breathes a deep sigh of relief just as Bill enters.*]

BILL. Ah, the sleeping beauty!

WIDOW [*Furious*]. Get out of here. [*He threatens to throw the bag at him, and Bill ducks behind a chair and pulls a pair of glasses out of his pocket and puts them on quickly.*]

BILL [*Pointing to the glasses*]. Unh-unh! Unh-uh! It's against the law to hit a man with glasses on.

WIDOW. Why in the Sam Hill didn't you fasten this bag?

BILL. What?

WIDOW. You know what. You left this bag unfastened and it fell open and everything spilled out right before Boots.

BILL [*Bursting into laughter*]. You don't say! Razor and all?

WIDOW. Yes, and I have got to get out of here quick. I believe she suspected something.

BILL [*Laughing*]. And I missed that! I never did have any luck. How did you explain it off?

WIDOW. I told her I wore men's pajamas all the time almost.

BILL. Well, that sounds all right.

WIDOW. But she said "I understand" kind of funny like, and went right off. Come on and take me to town.

BILL. No. Not a chance. I lose my twenty-five dollars if you leave before the party is over tonight.

[*Further conversation is prevented by Boots coming into the door. She seems in an angry mood.*]

BOOTS. Bill, you go on in there and join the dance. I want to talk with Mrs. Penny.

BILL. Sure. Mrs. Penny and I have been having a pleasant chat.

BOOTS. So I observe. [*Bill leaves. The Widow picks up the bag again.*] Oh, don't be in a hurry.

WIDOW [*Placing the bag down again*]. I have to be going shortly.

BOOTS. Father just told me that you had something to say to me.

WIDOW. Who— Me? Why . . .

BOOTS [*Cutting her short*]. Don't stall. I know what it is. You have been advising him to marry Mrs. Hemingway, and he seems to think that you can persuade me that it is the best thing.

WIDOW [*With some spirit*]. Well, I do think it is the best.

BOOTS [*Angry*]. Now, see here, you have come in here and tried to handle things in a high-handed manner and I have apologized and tried to keep from quarreling in order to please Daddy, but if you think you are going to order me around and tell me to keep quiet and let my own father marry another woman to bring in here to boss me, then you are sadly mistaken.

WIDOW. Now, you listen to me, Miss Boyd. I once thought very highly of you. I thought I saw in you possibilities of developing into a splendid woman. Of course, I saw at once . . .

BOOTS [*Interrupting*]. And if you think I am going to stand here and be lectured to . . .

WIDOW [*Interrupting*]. You are going to listen to me if I have to hold you. As I said, I saw at once that you were a spoiled, overpampered girl who needed a good spanking, but I did think that underneath you had the making of a splendid girl. I find to my sorrow that I was mistaken all along, and that instead, what I thought to be only signs of being spoiled was your nature showing itself in its true light. Let me tell you that you are the most priggish, prudish, most selfish and intolerant girl that I ever knew in all my life. I pity the man that ever takes you for a wife. The young people here are talking about the way you have treated the boys that have been nice to you and who tried to show you a good time, and you yourself admitted to me that you deliberately called up another boy and walked out on a date with the man you loved just because he was a little late—for no other reason than to feed your selfish vanity.

For near twenty years your father has lived for you only.

He has wasted all those years of his young manhood when he could have remarried and begun building up a happy home that would have been a pleasure to him in his old age, and all because he wanted to do everything for you. Then when you began to grow older and he found a woman who could make him happy again you ruled against, and begged him not to marry. And for what reason? I'll tell you, just because you didn't want another woman in the house. It pleased your vanity to think that you ruled your father. So you told him no. Told him that you would elope with Howard Nutz if he even thought of remarrying. Your own selfish nature prompted you to bully him into remaining single, and thus force him to grow old all alone. There might be some excuse for your conduct if you were going to be with him all his life, but you know that you are not. In a few years you will be married yourself, and will you want to take your father in and care for him when he is old and sick? No, you won't. Your selfish nature wouldn't let you.

BOOTS [*Almost on verge of tears from mingled chagrin and anger*]. Oh—oh—oh! [*She whirls on her heel and starts for the door.*]

WIDOW. That's right run out so you can't hear the truth. Go on and elope with that Howard Nutz—and may the Lord pity Mr. Nutz!

BOOTS [*Whirling at the door. Some of the anger seems to have left her and she is almost in tears*]. You—You'll be sorry you talked to me like that. [*She disappears, and Mrs. Hemingway enters.*]

WIDOW. How do you do, Mrs. Hemingway. Come right in.

MRS. HEMINGWAY [*Coldly*]. Howdy.

WIDOW. Have a seat. I shall call Mr. Boyd. I'm sure he shall be glad to see you.

MRS. H. Thanks. [*She moves over towards a seat, and the Widow starts out and meets the Professor at the door.*]

WIDOW. Mrs. Hemingway to see you, sir.

PROF. Thanks. Did you talk to Boots?

WIDOW. I did.

PROF [*Eagerly*]. What did she say?

WIDOW. Nothing much.

PROF. Oh. [*The Widow leaves and Prof. turns to Mrs. Hemingway.*] How do you do, Audry?

MRS. H. Quite well, thank you.

PROF. It is nice of you to drop by this evening.

MRS. H. Ned, I have come to say something to you that I hate to say.

PROF [*Concerned*]. What is it, my dear?

MRS. H. I have put off saying it as long as possible, but I think something needs to be said, and that at once.

PROF. I hope you will feel free to say it to me, Audry.

MRS. H. It is about her—that Mrs. Penny.

PROF. I see. What about her.

MRS. H. Why the whole community is talking about her being here, and the attention you are paying to her. I don't think it sounds good when you are engaged to me for this kind of gossip to be going the rounds.

PROF. Why, my dear, I hadn't dreamed of such a thing. There is absolutely nothing between us.

MRS. H. I am willing enough to believe you, but what about the neighbors?

PROF [*Worried*]. Yes, that is right. [*Defending.*] But Mrs. Penny has been a perfect lady.

MRS. H. From what I have seen she could have been a little more discreet in her attentions to you.

PROF. But, my dear, instead of her paying attention to me she has just this morning promised to use her influence in talking to Boots and trying to reconcile her to our marriage.

MRS. H. [*Brightening up, and putting on a smile*]. She did?

PROF. Yes. She had just finished talking to her when you came in. That was what I was asking her about.

MRS. H. [*Eagerly*]. What did Boots say?

PROF. I don't know.

MRS. H. Then I have been accusing Mrs. Penny wrongly. I shall have to go apologize to her this very minute. [*She rises to go.*]

PROF. I am sure you shall find her graciously ready to forgive. [*Mrs. Hemingway leaves, and Boots enters from the opposite door.*]

BOOTS. Oh, Father. Here you are.

PROF [*Kindly*]. Did you want to speak to me, Boots?

BOOTS [*Almost in tears*]. Yes. I—I want to have a talk with you.

PROF. Certainly. Come on over here and let's sit down so you can tell me about it. [*They sit.*] Now.

BOOTS. Daddy, I just talked with Mrs. Penny, and she made me see what a terrible little selfish prig I have been.

PROF. Why, no, no, dear. You have been no such thing.

BOOTS. But I have too. I see it now—just as plain. Daddy, I want you to marry Mrs. Hemingway.

PROF. Why, Boots, what has come over you?

BOOTS. Nothing. [*She buries her head on the back of the divan.*] Only I have been so selfish. I didn't see what it meant to you, and how much you had sacrificed just for my sake until she told me.

PROF [*Patting her on the head*]. There, there, now, don't cry. It's all right. I did nothing but what I wanted to do.

BOOTS. But you will promise to get married, won't you?

PROF. Why if you really wish that I should.

BOOTS. I do, Daddy.

PROF. Then I shall right away.

BOOTS [*Suddenly jumping up and kissing him on the cheek quickly*]. Oh, I'm so happy. [*She darts out of the door, and Prof. sits looking affectionately in the direction she has gone. Mary and Howard enter.*]

HOWARD [*To Prof*]. Mrs. Hemingway said to tell you she would like to speak with you a moment in the library.

PROF [*Rising and going out*]. Thank you. [*He disappears.*]

MARY. Wasn't Boots crying when she went through the room a moment ago.

HOWARD. She seems to be in the weeps.

MARY. What was that she said to you?

HOWARD. Oh, she just told me that she had a date with me for the dance.

MARY. She did? Do you mean to say Boots did that?

HOWARD. It certainly jarred me too. First time she was ever really nice to me like that. Usually I have to ask about a dozen times before I get a date, and then to have her come

right up to me and tell me that she wanted a date with me.

MARY. I guess now I shall have to vamp Bill.

HOWARD [*Rather cockily*]. Oh, well, I'll ask you to be the maid of honor at our wedding. [*They make their way towards the opposite door.*]

MARY. Well, it won't be hard to imagine with Boots acting like that.

HOWARD. Would it be so hard to imagine anyway?

MARY. Frankly, yes. [*They go out the door, and immediately afterwards Bill and Percival come in, Bill leading the way walking rapidly.*]

PERCIVAL. I say, old chap, what's all the hurry?

BILL. Hurry, I've got to find Mary. Boots just gave me my A.W.O.L.

PERCIVAL. A.W.O.L.? What in the by George is that?

BILL. A.W.O.L. means walking papers, my boy—walking papers. I'm jilted. In other words, I had a date and she told me to get another one.

PERCIVAL. I say, these girls do have such queer ways of doing things all of a sudden.

BILL. Just another old American custom, Perc, old boy. You'll learn that too if you stay over here as long as I have.

PERCIVAL. What was her reason?

BILL [*Snapping his fingers*]. Just like that. No reason at all. But I have an idea that the Widow Penny had a finger in that pie. It looks like some of her work. [*The Widow enters. Bill sees her.*] Speak of the devil and his imps will appear. Come on in. I have a crow to pick.

WIDOW. I don't have to pick any crow. I'm getting out of here.

BILL. Ah, no. Nothing doing.

WIDOW. I mean it this time.

BILL. Not and make me lost twenty-five dollars. [*The three have their backs turned to the door, right, and Boots enters and stands unobserved looking at them.*]

WIDOW. Hang your twenty-five dollars. I'll pay you the twenty-five.

BILL [*Laughing*]. That makes it different. Pay me! [*The Widow reaches into the neck of her dress and pulls the pocket-*

book from her breast.]

BILL [*Punches Percival and winks*]. See there, old chap, she's learning the ways of women all right.

PERCIVAL [*Laughing*]. Righto, bah-jove.

WIDOW. If there was a fool-killer he would certainly have had you two dead a long time ago. [*Counts out the money, and starts to hand it to Bill, but Boots interrupts the procedure by speaking and the three turn startled to see her.*]

BOOTS [*Coming forward*]. You needn't pay him. I have already recognized you.

PERCIVAL [*Gleefully*]. Then, bah-jove, old top [*To Bill*] you owe me the bally twenty-five kissers—smackers, bah-jove. Pay me! Boy, pay me!

BILL [*Making a rueful face as he pulls the twenty-five dollars from his pocket and hands it to Percival*]. I never did have any luck.

PERCIVAL [*Imitating Bill's former speech*]. Bah-jove, old topper, don't ever bet with your Uncle Dudley. It's just donating, my boy, donating!

[*During this time the Widow has been furtively glancing up at Boots only to meet her hard stare.*]

BOOTS [*To Bill and Percival*]. You leave us alone. I want to talk to him.

BILL. Oh, now, Boots, don't be too hard on him. It really was partly my fault. [*Boots doesn't reply and Bill and Percival start to leave, but Bill turns at the door and calls back.*] Good luck, Jed. Tell her I did it.

[*Jed and Boots face each other for a second.*]

JED [*Doggedly*]. All right go ahead. Let's get it over with.

BOOTS. Just a few minutes ago you lectured to me, and I'll admit that you taught me a lesson that was for my own good. You made me see things as I should have done a long time ago, and you gave me a sound lecturing that I won't forget soon, but now you are going to listen to me while I do some lecturing. Of all the dirty, low-down, contemptible, undermining, sneaking, double-crossing, cheap tricks that I have ever heard of you are guilty of it. For anyone to have the nerve and effrontry to masquerade as a woman and come into a respectable home and subject friends to the ridicule of peo-

ple is unbelievable. Did you realize that you had done something for which you can be sued? You have disgraced us, and I shall see that my father causes you to get the punishment that you deserve for this. Now get out. [*The Widow turns to go.*]

BOOTS. Don't you have a word to say in defense?

WIDOW [*Turning to say something*]. Why, yes . . .

BOOTS [*Cutting him short*]. I don't want to hear it. Go! [*He turns to go out of the door, right, and she quickly goes out left. Bill and Percival meet him near the door right.*]

BILL [*Eagerly and with excitement*]. What did she say, old boy?

WIDOW. You get out. You have fixed it all right.

BILL. Yeah, and you got me minus twenty-five dollars.

JED [*With contempt*]. What's twenty-five dollars?

BILL [*With a wry gesture of appeal towards Percival*]. Perc, listen. He asks *me* what's twenty-five dollars. You tell him. I can't.

PERCIVAL. I say, old hoss, did she leave you up in—what do you say—the—ah—atmosphere.

BILL. Now I see why you Englishmen can't learn to talk American. You try to use too big words. It's air—up in the air.

PERCIVAL. Bally right, old top—the air.

BILL [*Seriously*]. Was she very hot sure enough?

JED. Plenty. She says she is going to have her father sue me.

BILL. No!

PERCIVAL [*Imploringly*]. Bah-jove, old top, I implore you to keep me out of it in case it comes to the worse. I have heard of the inefficiency of your American courts, but I prefer not to get tangled up with one of them.

BILL [*Grinning*]. Oh, you're tall, Percy. You would look good in stripes.

PERCIVAL. But those bally chain gang stripes run the wrong way.

BILL. Maybe the warden will have your suit made to order.

JED. Cut the comedy, Bill. This is really serious. I think she has gone now to tell her father.

BILL [*Seriously again*]. You know you can count on me, Jed. I helped get you into it, and I am going to stand by you and help get you out.

PERCIVAL. Bah-jove, old top, count me in too.

JED [*Generously*]. Thanks. I'll probably need you. Do you have the car handy?

BILL. Yes. It's out at the front now.

JED. Then wait here for me until I get these clothes off. [*He leaves.*]

PERCIVAL. I say, this is really embarrassing.

BILL. It's worse than that. We've got to get Jed out of this somehow.

PERCIVAL. But what can we do?

BILL. I don't know. I'm going to see. [*He starts out just as Jane and Mary come in.*]

MARY. Where you going in such a hurry?

BILL. I got to find Boots. You know where she is?

MARY. I don't.

BILL. Well, I got to find her. [*He leaves.*]

JANE. What's got Bill looking so serious, Percival?

PERCIVAL. Hadn't you heard about it?

JANE. About What?

MARY. Has something happened?

PERCIVAL. About Jed and the Widow Penny.

JANE [*Excited*]. Oh, I bet they're in love.

MARY. No!

PERCIVAL [*Shaking his head*]. It's worse than that.

MARY. Don't tell me they are married.

PERCIVAL. No, hang it. They're the same.

JANE [*Greatly excited*]. The same what?

PERCIVAL. Same everything. The same people.

MARY. Come on, Percy. Snap out of the fog and tell us what you are trying to say.

PERCIVAL. Hang it, I have told you. The Widow Penny was Jed. He dressed up like that to play a trick on Boots and she found out.

JANE [*Exclaiming and bursting out laughing*]. Oh!

MARY [*Bursting into laughter*]. Well, of all! [*The two are laughing uproariously.*]

PERCIVAL [*Seriously*]. But, I say, it is no laughing matter. Boots found out and she has gone to tell her father, and says she is going to sue him.

JANE [*She and Mary are suddenly serious*]. No?

PERCIVAL. Yes.

MARY. Why, she wouldn't dare.

PERCIVAL. But she is.

JANE [*To Mary*]. Come on and let's talk to Boots. [*Laughing again.*] I never heard such a good joke in all my life. Maybe if we talk to her she will forgive him.

MARY. I doubt it. [*They are leaving just as Bill comes in again with a serious expression on his face.*]

JANE. Oh, Bill, did you see Boots?

BILL. Yes?

MARY. What did she say?

BILL. You two go talk to her. She won't listen to me.

MARY. All right. Come, Jane. [*They go out.*]

PERCIVAL [*Troubled*]. I say, this is awful.

BILL. I'm sorry for Jed. He really liked the girl, and she will never forgive him.

PERCIVAL. Right now I'm worried more about the Professor than I am about Boots. [*Just here the Professor enters. He has a hard expression on his face, Bill and Percival exchange worried nervous glances.*]

PROF. Where is Mr. Harding?

BILL. Jed? Oh—uh—He went up to his room. Said he'd be right down.

PROF. Very good.

BILL. I say, Professor, I hope you will view this in the right light.

PROF. This is a private matter between Mr. Harding and me. I prefer to take the matter up with him.

BILL. Yes, sir. [*The Professor paces the floor with his hands behind his back, while Bill and Percival stand fidgeting, and exchanging occasional nervous glances. After a moment Jed enters. He is dressed in his own clothes, and has a hand-bag in his hand. He takes in the situation and comes forward and puts the bag down.*]

JED. I guess you wanted to see me, Mr. Boyd.

PROF. Yes. [*To Bill and Percival.*] I wish to speak to Mr. Harding alone.

PERCIVAL [*Turning as if glad to get a chance to go*]. Yes, sir.

BILL [*Holding his ground*]. Please, sir, I would like to say a word before I go.

PROF. Well?

BILL. I know all the circumstances, and I want you to know that I am largely responsible for Jed being here like that.

PROF. Why you?

BILL. Percival and I bet he couldn't dress as the widow and come here without being recognized. He intended to stay for a day only, but I made him stay so I could win my bet.

PROF. Is that all?

BILL. Yes, sir.

PROF. Very well, I'll take that into consideration.

BILL [*Seeing he is dismissed turns to go*]. Yes, sir. [*He and Percival disappear.*]

PROF [*Turning to Jed*]. Young man, I suppose you know you have been guilty of an embarrassing offense for all concerned.

JED. Yes, sir.

PROF. What have you to say in justification of your conduct?

JED. Only this, sir. I thought I would masquerade for a day—to be frank, sir, just to get a chance to give Boots a good lecturing for the way she acted the other night of the dance when she left us because we were a little late.

PROF [*Nodding his head in half-approval*]. I'll admit she needed the lecture, but did that justify you going this far with it?

JED. Bill explained that, sir. They wouldn't let me out of it. They promised to tell if I quit, and I was afraid you and Boots would be angry with me if you found out.

PROF. I see. [*A smile is beginning to play about the corners of his mouth.*]

JED. I wish to apologize to you and your daughter, and of course I am willing to take the consequences of what I have done.

PROF [*Breaking into laughter much to Jed's surprise*]. Young man, instead of condemning you I want to thank you. [*He extends his hand.*]

JED [*Dumbfounded, takes his hand listlessly*]. Uh—you—you thank me?

PROF [*Laughing at his astonishment*]. Yes. I think it one of the best jokes ever pulled on me. You were perfect. And furthermore you have done me a real service.

JED [*Still puzzled*]. Yes, sir.

PROF. For the first time in years I have seen Boots really obey someone. I think you have taught her a lesson that I never could have myself. She seems completely changed during the past two days. [*Chuckling.*] After the lecture you gave her she actually came to me and told me that she wanted me to marry again, and she has opposed it for years.

Consider the incident closed, young man, and forget about it. It was a practical joke that as far as I am concerned turned out very valuable. I have no ill feelings on the score, and shall be glad to have you visit my home often. And I hope you do not have to go now, and I feel that my daughter will soon forget it as well.

JED [*Breathing relief*]. Thank you, sir. Thank you *very* much.

PROF [*Turning to go*]. Wait here a minute. [*He leaves.*]

JED. Yes, sir. [*The moment the Professor disappears Bill sticks his head in the opposite door, and then comes in.*]

BILL. Say, boy, what did he say? Is he going to sue you?

JED [*Listlessly*]. No. He thought it was a joke.

BILL [*Ecstatically*]. He did! Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy! Tell me about it.

JED [*Ignoring his question*]. Did you see Boots?

BILL [*His face falling*]. Yeah. She wouldn't see you. Said she didn't ever want to see you again.

JED. Well, I'm ready to go. [*He picks up the bag just as Boots enters. Bill sees her and starts for the front door hurriedly.*]

BILL. I'll be waiting at the car.

BOOTS [*Her voice hard*]. Father said you wanted to see me.

JED. Yes, I did—but I guess it's no use.

BOOTS [*Whirling as if to go*]. Oh, then, you didn't want to?

JED [*Quickly*]. Yes I did. Wait a minute.

BOOTS [*Turning*]. Then, what was it?

JED. Boots, couldn't you forgive me for what I've done. Honestly, I feel terrible about this.

BOOTS. Never! But I do want to know why you did it?

JED. Because of what you did the other night.

BOOTS. So you thought you would make me the laughing stock of my friends?

JED. No. It wasn't that. It was because I loved you, Boots, and I wanted to find out if you really were selfish and hard like you tried to appear to be.

BOOTS [*Her tone softening*]. Because you loved me?

JED [*Taking courage*]. Yes, Boots. I really do.

BOOTS [*Hardening again*]. Then what about what you said when you told me to go ahead and marry Howard and may the Lord help him. That sounded like you loved me!

JED. But I was angry. I really thought you intended to elope with him.

BOOTS [*Beginning to smile*]. I see.

[*Jane, Mary and Percival are seen peeping into the doorway behind Jed's and Boots' backs.*]

JED. Then, won't you forgive me, and forget all this.

BOOTS. I guess so.

[*Jane, Mary and Percival come rushing in to the surprise of the two.*]

JANE. Oh, goody, goody! [*She rushes over and hugs Boots.*]

MARY. Oh, I'm so glad!

BOOTS. What were you three doing—eavesdropping?

JANE. Percival told us you two were here, and we just had to find out.

PERCIVAL [*Proudly*]. Now, that's what I call ripping of you, Miss Boyd. Congratulations, Jed, old chap.

JED. Thanks, Percy.

BOOTS [*Smiling as she catches Jed by the arm*]. Jed is going to join the party too.

JANE AND MARY. Hooray!

JANE [*Grabbing Percival by the arm*]. Come on you two

let's go find Bill and tell him. [*They start out.*]

JED. You will find him in the car. [*They disappear.*]

BOOTS. You will stay, of course?

JED. You're nice when you want to be. [*Howard enters. He recognizes Jed.*]

HOWARD [*Rather coldly*]. Hello, Jed. I didn't know you had returned.

BOOTS [*Laughing towards Jed*]. He returned rather unexpectedly. And is joining the party.

HOWARD. Isn't it about time for us to get ready for the dance?

BOOTS. I say, Howard, I am sure you will pardon me for breaking my date with you, but since Jed returned unexpectedly I feel that I as hostess must look after him. I am sure Elizabeth will be glad to go with you. Would you mind being with her instead?

HOWARD [*Peered*]. Quite convenient way of handling things—for you. [*He turns and goes out after a hateful glance at Jed.*]

JED. Is that quite fair to him?

BOOTS. Of course, if you don't want a date with me—

JED [*Interrupting*]. You know better. But if you're engaged—

BOOTS. But we aren't.

JED. You mean you weren't going to elope after all?

BOOTS. No, silly. Didn't you see I was just teasing you. Why I have known it was you ever since that handbag fell open and your pajamas fell out.

JED [*Grimacing*]. How did you know then?

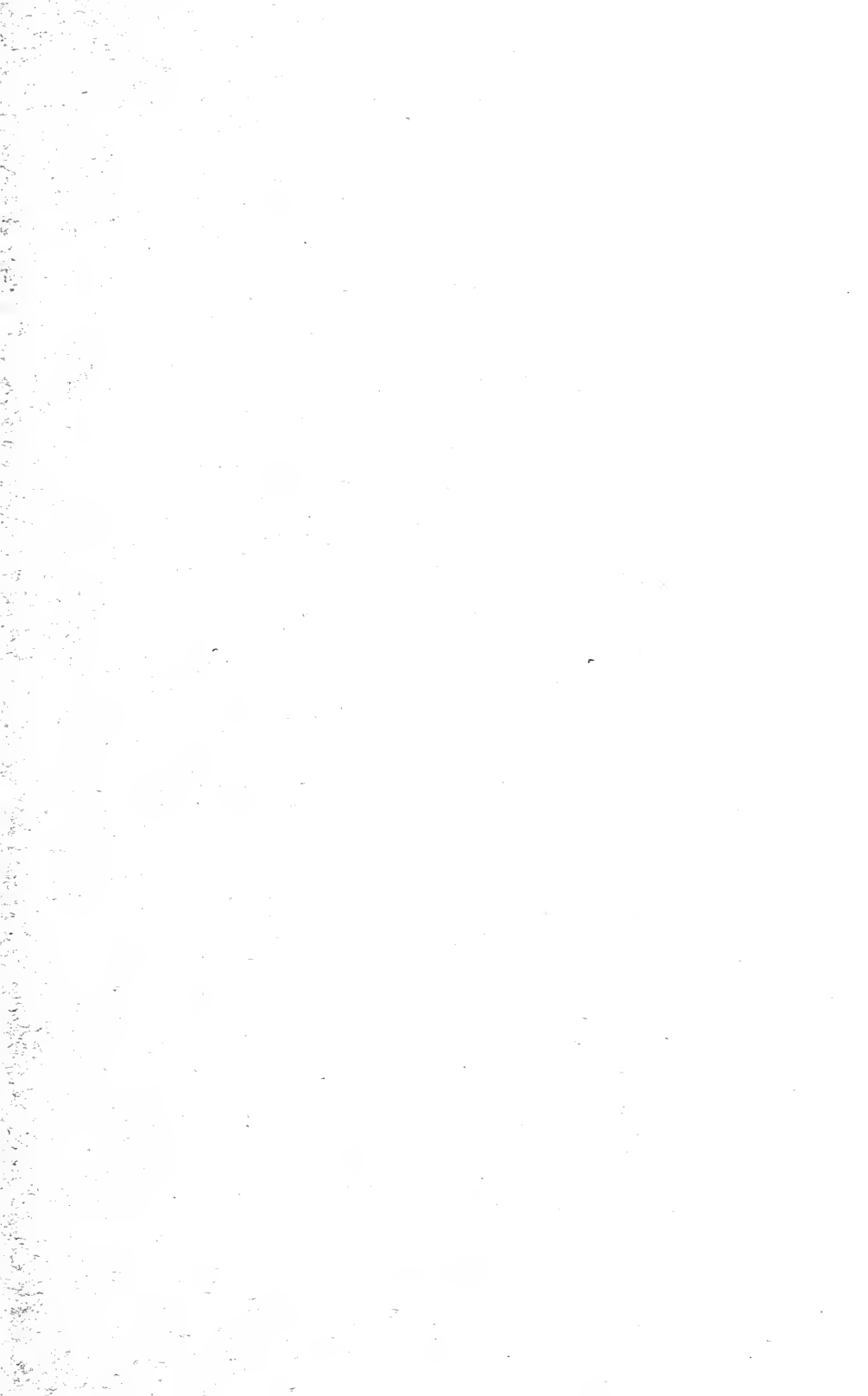
BOOTS. How could I help seeing your name on the laundry mark?

JED [*Laughing*]. I give up. But if you aren't engaged to Howard, what would you say if I proposed. [*He is about to take her into his arms.*]

BOOTS [*Evading him and slipping behind a chair*]. I refuse to answer in such a public place. [*The curtain begins to close.*]

JED [*Taking her by the arm and starting off*]. Then, come on. I know a place.

[*Quick Curtain.*]



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